

ARUNDHATI ROY ON MUMBAI CARNAGE



THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

December 22, 2008 Rs 25

LOST INNOCENCE
CHILDREN OF 26/11

OUTLOOK

COMING SOON:
MALAYALI DIVAS

SPORT: SHORT OF CASH

WHY TERROR DOESN'T SELL



*Parties learn a key lesson from the assembly elections.
Scare-mongering on the T-word doesn't fetch votes any longer.*

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HAMID GUL Former ISI DG

"Pakistan is not India's colony that (you can say) they have summoned our DG ISI."



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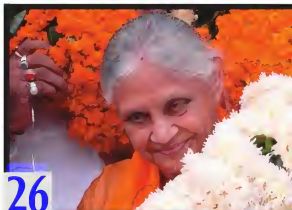
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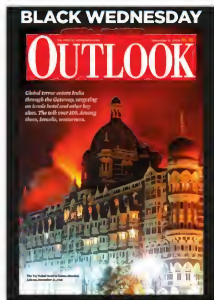
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WHEELS OF FORTUNE OFFER

WIN A CAR A MONTH

Turn to page no.72



How Long Do We Bleed?

Where do we go from here? What next? What happens after all the speeches are over and all the press conferences have ended? What happens after the microphones have been turned off (*Haemorrhage...*, Dec 8)? I see a mother crying every time she looks at the garlanded picture of her son. I see a wife shed silent tears each time she sees the empty chair on the dining table. I see a father put up a brave front, whenever he sees his son's motorbike. I see a hotel waiter shudder each time he hears a loud noise. Then I see the neta give another public speech, promising to punish the murderers. Then I see the corporate CEO announce another sponsorship for another cricketer.

ANU AGGARWAL, DUBAI

When Abhinav Bindra and a couple of others won medals at the Beijing Olympics in August, the state governments tripped over each other to award them. Cut to the present, post Mumbai, the irony is so thick it chokes, to see that the real ace shooters (the NSG and others) will get a minuscule fraction, if anything at all.

BHARATH GOPALAKRISHNAN, ON E-MAIL

Thank you Mr Patil for gracefully moving on...though it's three months too late.

SAM PAUL, HYDERABAD

I sometimes think the biggest curse of our nation is our democracy, in which many of our so-called rights remain only on paper, while terrorists exploit those very rights to get away with their horrendous acts. The other curse is our politicians, who are unaccountable to anyone.

PREM, ON E-MAIL

The current mass hysteria against politicians must be tempered. The country is passing through a grave international crisis following the Mumbai attacks. We are a nuclear-armed state and we face another nation that is similarly armed but politically unstable. A single mistake at the top may result in the wiping out of both Mumbai and Karachi. Thank God we have leaders like Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi and Pranab Mukherjee, who are calm and cool. We must not add to their considerable burden with rabid jingoism or religious bigotry. This is a time for restraint.

J.S. BANDUKWALA, VADODRA

Listening to Indian news channels (*At the Edges of Restraint*, Dec 15), one would think it is these verbose anchors who know how best to handle internal security and the governance of our country. Their patronising attitude is sickening.

RITA PANICKER, NEW DELHI

26/11 may be in a category different from the '93 blasts as far as the methodology goes, but can anyone believe such an operation was carried out by 10 jihadis without local help?

K.C. SHARMA, DELHI

We have no choice but to wage a full-fledged battle against terrorism, the way the US did

after the 9/11 attacks. Without harbouring any second thoughts, we should set up an all-party government and launch hot pursuit of terrorists, wherever they may be.

S.M. ACHARYA, PUNE

An eye for an eye leaves everyone blind. If that's true, I prefer to be blind (and retain an iota of self-respect) rather than hang my head in shame, feel humiliated and tamely get back to the daily grind.

SANJEEV MOHANTY, ON E-MAIL

Even as you were doing an exclusive on the ATS investigation into the Malegaon blasts, fate was arranging a November 26 rendezvous for its chief Hemant Karkare and others (*Steel in the Driftwood*). The Sangh parivar and its voluble PM-designate should really be ashamed for at one time challenging Karkare's credibility. His death at the hands of terrorists is a straight slap on the face of these leaders.

KANWAL N.S. CHADHA, MOHALI

As some well-meaning people keep saying, "terrorists have no religion". So there's no need to stick to religious niceties as regards their bodies. Cremate them, for it leaves no possibility for them to turn martyrs at a later date. Also, their jannat aspirations will also go on hold.

BHARAT B. PRASHAR, SOUTHEND-ON-SEA, UK

Could we know how the ATS, under the late Hemant Karkare, an upright and able officer, was unable to get a whiff of the Mumbai attacks? Could it be that this officer was told by the powers that be to concentrate only on the Malegaon blasts, because it served a certain political purpose?

K.V. SHARMA, ON E-MAIL

Now that Hemant Karkare is dead, can the knickerwalas in

the US, UK, Denmark and wherever stop sully him so?
V.N. VENUGOPAL, NEW DELHI

It appears that many of our agencies had prior information about the attacks but did not act to prevent them. This is analogous to what happened when the tsunami struck. The government will now pretend to take some action to save itself from criticism and then it will be back to normal. The only way to avoid such attacks, I think, is to make available to the public all the information our agencies obtain so that they decide on what safety precautions to take or not take.

M. RAJ KUMAR,
VARAGUR, TAMIL NADU

With all due credit to our security forces for battling the terrorists in Mumbai, I must say their action seemed more like a mock battle. What our commanders should have done was to set off something like a large explosion to distract the terrorists and then taken them out, like the Israelis did in Entebbe. Such action sends a loud and clear message. Similarly, we can't make do with weak statements from our prime minister. What we need is the sort of message Indira Gandhi sent out to Pakistan before the 1971 war. Politics apart, the only person who seems capable of that sort of strong posturing is Narendra Modi.

M.V.S. RAO, SECUNDERABAD

As a young and outraged citizen, I am afraid of the direction our anger is taking. I can feel the violence in the visceral reaction whenever Pakistan is named. But knowing the country is often at war with itself, it is irresponsible to speak of it as a coherent, unified whole. Our news media seems to forget how sensitive Pakistan is an issue is, why fire up the embers? Here, I do recognise that in some twisted way this

serves their interest for revenues today are dependent on the increased heart rates. And isn't it all a little too convenient? We have cultivated a special skill that allows us to turn a blind eye to the violence committed by Indian extremist groups—Muslim and Hindu—against fellow citizens. It's easy to ignore our hypocrisy when our emotions are volatile and our wounds throbbing.

DEVIKA NARAYAN, MUMBAI

When Parliament was attacked by terrorists, people said that if a few politicians had been killed, it would have been better for the country as security preparedness would immediately go up. Predictably, there

I attended the citizen's gathering at the Gateway on Dec 3 and was overwhelmed by the numbers who came there to express grief, solidarity and anger. While there are a million questions, the silver lining to this black cloud is the fact that common people have come together like never before. As an immediate result, heads have rolled. But I think the very minimum has been done. Shivraj Patil, RR and Vilasrao have been sacrificed for the government to show that it's done 'something'. This is hardly sufficient. A complete overhaul of the system is required. It is important that we channelise this popular movement into an impetus for change. We cannot



has been no improvement in security since then. The Mumbai attacks have shown that if we want protection, we the people will have to take the initiative. Much like the families of the Uphaar tragedy victims who waged a fight for justice.

NIKHIL KAPUR, ON E-MAIL

Hundreds gathered to raise their voice against terrorism at the Gateway of India in Mumbai and Jantar Mantar in Delhi on December 3. Will the same unity continue among the people of this country in ensuring our elected MPs/ministers go beyond petty politics and discharge their duties honestly?

LAKSHMI VENKATRAMAN,
CHENNAI

let the momentum subside or else we will be as guilty as the establishment and the politicians that could not prevent this attack. As a start, we should change the name of the city back to BOMBAY. Ever since it was changed to MUMBAI around 1993, we've had bomb blasts, riots, floods, terrorist attacks. Even numerologists agree that 'mumbai' adds up to disaster while 'bombay' brings peace, prosperity.

SANJEEV S. MEHTA, MUMBAI

Farzana Contractor asks "Why Us?" (*The Band Stopped Playing*). Mumbai is no exception, such things happen all over India. She should have asked "Why India?" By pub-

lishing these narrow-minded articles you seem to suggest that terrorist attacks are OK for the rest of India, but not so for Mumbai!

DINESH KUMAR, CHANDIGARH

Since when did we have to get Rahul Bose (*No Curfew on Bombay, Please*) to wax eloquent on national security matters? He said on TV that citizens' liberties shouldn't be taken away the way they were in the US after 9/11. I live in the US, have travelled around the country, and have, in the years since 9/11, moved in and out of that country many times. Not once did I, an Indian who can easily be mistaken for a Pakistani or someone from West Asia, feel discriminated against. You should seek opinion from more sensible people.

ALAP, ON E-MAIL

I am a BJP supporter. Equally, I am a fan of VM and *Outlook*. Even so, I must say that the magazine disappointed me in publishing Rahul Bose's views in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks. What does he mean when he says, "But there's something we can do: be extremely vigilant that these random acts of terror are not used by the government to bolt the stable after the horses have fled." Does he mean that we should die to terrorists' bullets rather than submit to security checks?

DHEERAJ, ON E-MAIL

I opened the last page of the December 8 issue of *Outlook*, expecting a piece from Vinod Mehta. Sure, he had a diary but it wasn't on the Mumbai attack. Instead, Mr Mehta gleefully continued on the 'safronisation of the armed forces' theme his magazine has been singing. I flipped to the cover story, and sure he was there, unmistakable mug and all, lamenting *Ah, Bombay...* What he advocated was

not any stern measure or action against the perpetrators. Instead, we were forced to read about his unsuccessful attempts to woo the female hippies at the Leopold Cafe! Still pursuing the Congress policy of appeasing the Muslim minority, Mr Mehta? You haven't given up hope of an RS seat yet or perhaps a ticket for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, have you? This government's reaction/response was expected but *Outlook* could have shown some spine. Or is Mr Mehta still doing penance for publishing Francois Gautier's *Hindu Rate of Wrath*?

SAMIR DESAI, AHMEDABAD

Vinod Mehta in his edit asks if Mumbai will ever be the same again. I sure hope not. Mumbai and India can and should never go back. We must remember 26/11 forever, so that we never forget the lessons we learnt from it. Unlike most TV headlines that read 'Mumbai under attack', we should be very clear it was 'India under attack'. And each and every Indian today sheds tears and feels horror at what happened in one of our cities. The question is, what now? Where do we go from here and what do we do to ensure our nation is not held to ransom again?

ANITA SANGWAN, JAIPUR

Mr Mehta, no offence meant, but you are totally wrong from beginning to end. We need vigour and patriotism to fight this terror, not harmony, unity and other such sweet nothings.

H. RAQ, VADODARA

Isn't it ironic that nothing unites us more than the bullet of a terrorist who doesn't distinguish between caste, region or religion? If we have to channelise our anger, we must do it against the injustice that is meted out to fellow Indians irrespective of whether they are Christians, Muslims or

Hindus of any caste and against the politicians, whoever they may be, who create these differences to win elections. Good governance must become the only criterion for our vote, and if that happens, believe me, politicians too will start thinking about good governance. And we would have won the war against terror without firing a single bullet.

S.M. SHERVANI,
NEW DELHI

Once the initial outrage over Mumbai dies down, I won't be surprised if the families of slain heroes like Karkare, Unnikrishnan et al are made to run from pillar to post for their death benefits and if bribes are demanded from them for settlement. Politicians must already be drooling at the prospect of commissions they can make on the increased demand for weaponry, armour etc. After all, didn't they make money out of coffins post-Kargil? My greatest dread now, however: a 10-page piece from Arundhati!

RAJAN, CHENNAI

I must protest the attitude towards Indian intelligence. It is derogatory to say "Our intelligence-gathering network is in a shambles. The tragedy is that everyone, even Ramu the cook, knows how rundown IB and RAW are." Do you, Mr Mehta, know how to run intelligence services? I wouldn't even bother asking your cook. HEMANT K. CHITALE, SINGAPORE

We, as Indians, probably deserve this, because: ● Our leaders are elected not on capabilities but on caste and money power.... ● We elect the national assembly (Lok Sabha) on petty, local issues—in the process, providing jokers like Shibu Soren, Laloo Yadav,

Mayawati inordinate power. ● Our system allows known criminals like Abu Salem, Arun Gawli, Md Shahabuddin to fight elections! ● The Muslims are so gullible that they still believe the only ones who can protect them are named 'Mulayam' or 'Sonia'....

SUDARSHAN BENGANI,
CALCUTTA

What shocks me about the commando action in Mumbai is that, despite their best efforts, several innocent civilians died. They could have done



better to use some anaesthetic gas to render the terrorists unconscious. This could have saved several lives.

RAMNIK, ON E-MAIL

I request you to start a campaign to commemorate our commandos and security personnel who sacrificed their lives in the Mumbai attacks. It could involve something as simple as sending their families cards and flowers on every festive occasion. People could also visit their families.

M.K. MISHRA, NOIDA

Now that Mumbai is safe, our secular activists will tell us of the barbarism shown by our security forces. They will tell us how they were unable to sleep

for nights because they saw the body of a terrorist fall to the ground from a hotel window. We will be told, and our neta's will agree, that the security forces should have shown more restraint.

SHIVI GUPTA, ON E-MAIL

My fear is that the next target is going to be western offshore oil installations. It would be a crushing blow to our national morale and our economy. As regards the safety and security of these oil installations, I have been part of six inquiry committees, three of which have been government-independent panels. It is regrettable that the government has hardly acted on any of those recommendations.

MAJ GEN S.C.N. JATAR
(RETD), PUNE

Whenever some blasts or terrorist attacks take place, I tell myself, my wife and my little daughter that Chandigarh may well be next.

BIPRADIP B., CHANDIGARH

I was dining at a restaurant in the Trident when the terror attacks commenced. I was among the lucky ones who survived. This is to express my thanks to the alert hotel staff without whom I wouldn't have been writing this letter today.

VINEETHA, ON E-MAIL

Why has an ineffective home minister been replaced by an equally inexperienced Chidambaram? Why is the Congress still protecting Rahul Gandhi? Why can't this portfolio be given to him?

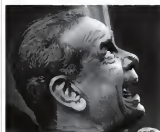
A. NAIR, BANGALORE

The terrorist attacks on Mumbai prove one thing beyond doubt—that Raj Thackeray is only a small-time goon.

ARUN PUNGALIA, JODHPUR

An Emperor Crowned

While Pt Bhimsen Joshi no doubt deserves the highest recognition for his art, I have a serious problem with the government deciding who to "honour" and when (*Bhimsen Joshi Hazir Ho*, Dec 8). Political-



sation, ideological biases and corruption play a bigger role than actual artistic criteria. There is an element of sham in such honour and we can do without it. Pt Joshi certainly doesn't need the government to certify his greatness.

ADI, ON E-MAIL

Sunil Menon's beautiful tribute reminds me of an incident that irradiates the sensibilities of our classical music greats. Kishori Amonkar was performing at the Gulmarg Golf Club, Kashmir, where Dr Farooq Abdullah too was present. Someone brought pears and started passing them around the select audience. So incensed was Amonkar that she refused to perform any further!

RAJIV CHOPRA, JAMMU

Unnamed Keg

Your investigative report on the Assam blasts (*Powder Burns*, Dec 8) showed only the tip of the iceberg, not what lies beneath. The question is, who is funding all these terrorist activities? Everybody knows about the presence of an Islamic outfit, but authorities keep denying the obvious facts. What else can you expect when a sold-out Congress government, which protects the actual

In a Higher Form

When I read Vinod Mehta saying in his *Delhi Diary* (Dec 8), "I don't have much of an education", I wondered whether, as a reader, I was in safe hands. But as I turned the pages (it's back to front for me) and read the self-same personage proclaiming in the essay *Ah, Bombay...* that he was reared intellectually (leaving aside the physical) in a cafe, I breathed easy. Cheers to the Editor!

C.G. RISHIKESH, CHENNAI

It seems misty-eyed nostalgia has indeed got the better of Vinod Mehta! I too was a student around that time, and while I did learn some lessons at La Martiniere—such as how to eat a toothpaste sandwich—the art of enduring public humiliation as well as valuing the enormous role of sports and humour in Anglo-Saxon culture (of possible value in negotiating one's way in the US) has stood me in good stead. Possibly, these lessons outweigh the scars of school. But I'm afraid I did not develop any love of learning or compassion for fellow beings. Tellingly, none of those prefects we all looked up to achieved much outside the 'hothouse' and inbred atmosphere at La Martiniere. The teachers were middling, the one exception being Mr Sidney Lewis, a gentleman and a coach extraordinaire.

SUMANT RAWAT, PUEBLO, US



offenders, can't see beyond polls, power and money.

KRISHANOD SHRIMAYEE, DERGEON, ASSAM

Jolly Rogers

The Somali pirates were fools, that's why they were hovering around the well-protected Gulf of Aden (*A Brigand's Eye View Of The Sea*, Dec 8). Had



they been wandering around the Indian coast, nobody would have found them. Because, to paraphrase the Deputy CM of Maharashtra, it is a long coast and one can expect such people to roam around doing business.

GANESAN, NEW JERSEY

An Eye-Patch

In the article on K'wood stars supporting Lankan Tamils (*Stars & Stripes*, Dec 8), *Outlook* has unwittingly given a one-sided, Brahminical view, which can only stoke caste sentiments in Tamil Nadu. If you really want to know the facts, please publish the other point of view. Otherwise, you will be perpetuating your traditional image of being a north Indian magazine.

S. GANDHI, ON E-MAIL

Courting Justice

Mahatma Gandhi honed his skills in fighting injustice by adopting methods of non-violence and satyagraha in the fledgling movement against apartheid in South Africa (*The Unending Struggle of Memory Against Injustice*, Dec 1). In his own country, though, it seems violence and non-tolerance are increasing at an alarming rate.

Can't we follow the South African constitutional court and also incorporate memorials that act as reminders of our freedom struggle?

R.K. MAHAJAN, NEW SHIMLA

Faulty Gramps

Your *Polscape* of Nov 24 mentions that Rahul Gandhi wants to "draw inspiration from his grandfather" at Teen Murti House. As far as I know, Rahul's grandfathers were Feroz Gandhi on his father's side, and Stefano Maino on his mother's—neither of whom spent any appreciable length of time in TMI. I certainly hope you don't think Chacha Nehru was Rahul's grandpa (especially with the rose in the buttonhole cartoon!)

PRADOSH GHOSH, RENUAGAR

Gathering Net

Technological advances have certainly made our lives more open and vulnerable to people bent on misusing them (*Someone Watching Over You*, Dec 1). There is nothing personal in the world of internet. In the excitement of discovering the world and enmeshing themselves in the thick of technology, people are sacrificing their privacy.

K. CHIDANAND KUMAR, BANGALORE

Clarification



A concept picture of the Sony PSP 3000 was carried in our Technology Special issue (Beware, A Storm is Brewing, Dec 1). Here's what the portable game machine actually looks like.

BULL'S EYE

Rajinder Puri

AT LAST INDIA'S MIDDLE CLASS GOT JOLTED BY A WAKE-UP CALL. THE livid anger aroused by the Mumbai terror attack encompassed celebrities spluttering on TV and ordinary thousands thronging streets. This exhibition of anger evokes a sense of pathos. It also evokes a faint hope. It is easy to laugh at the impotent rage of the middle class. One shouldn't. India's middle class is a creature of circumstance, a child of history. For six decades it abdicated its natural role. In most democracies, the middle class provides political leadership to a nation. Why didn't that happen in India?

The comparatively benign role of British colonialism made India's elite lose its most precious asset. Despite its intelligence, energy and talent the middle class lacks independent critical faculty. Intellectually, it became a slave of the English speaking west, first of Britain, then of America. The acceptance of western democratic values, good in itself, created an inferiority complex towards the people who originated them. Now a new generation has grown up. Hopefully it will banish the sense of inferiority that afflicted the older generation.

India's freedom struggle was led by the western educated middle class. After Independence, its members got busy with careers and professions, comforted by the thought that the Nehru dynasty, imbued with similar values, ruled the nation. Over the years, the values got eroded, governance deteriorated and India increasingly was ruled by hoodlums instead of competent leaders. It is fallacious to trace this decline to the political empowerment of weaker castes and communities. Both English-speaking Ambedkar and Tamil-speaking Kamaraj, acquitted themselves with exemplary democratic conduct. Politicians today do not. They have corrupted the system. They have destroyed governance. That is why 26/11 happened. That is why the middle class for the first time is realising that no single party but the entire political class is guilty.

But to what end? Middle-class spokespersons in TV studios and on the streets make similar demands: they want accountability, efficiency and governance. They light candles and raise slogans. It is this kind of naivete which invites ridicule mixed with pity. If the middle class is genuinely seized by the democratic spirit, why just light candles? Why not exercise the freedoms of expression and association still available to it? There is only one honest solution: the creation of a new political party representing the new, emerging political culture. All else is irrelevant. Is the middle class up to it? ■

(Puri can be reached at rajinderpuri2000@yahoo.com)



MIRROR IMAGE



by Sandeep Adhwaru

CROSSINGS

BIGAMY

Haryana Dy CM CHANDER MOHAN is sacked after he converts, drops his wife of 18 years to marry law officer Anuradha Bali. Patriarch Bhan Lal is livid.



RIOTS

GREECE IN flames. A 15-year-old dies in police firing and a country, already battling recession, high interest rates and a PM in Costas Karamanlis, fumes. Four days of riots ensue.



TOP 10

Shuttler SAINA NEHWAL, 18, cracks the Top 10 in the BWF rankings, picks up Most Promising Player award too. She's also a current Jr world champ, all a first for Indian women.



RULES

News channels agree to an "EMERGENCY PROTOCOL" to deal with 26/11 type situations. Delayed live coverage, expunging info on operation details part of it.



CAUGHT

Ex-England all-rounder CHRIS LEWIS, 40, caught with four kilos of cocaine while returning from the Caribbean. The cricketer's career had hit the skids after repeat injuries.



POLSCAPE

"If the LTTE is wiped out, those political jokers like P. Nedumaran, Vaiko etc will lose their incomes..." —Lankan army chief Sarath Fonseka's take on Tamil Nadu politicians causes much furore

Draupadi To The Rescue

IT'S ANOTHER MAHABHARAT in Karnataka. Deve Gowda's daughter-in-law and ex-CM Kumaraswamy's wife, Anita, is contesting the by-poll from Madhugiri, against a former Gowda family



loyalist who has since switched over to the BJP. The humble farmer's detractors have been quick to draw the analogy to ridicule this "desperate move". They say pushing Anita into the electoral fray is like the final gamble of the Pandavas in which they pawned Draupadi. But sources say the Gowda family is secretly relieved—at least the comparison is with the virtuous Pandavas and not those nasty Kauravas. ■

Will He Survive?

ASHOK CHAVAN WHO? THAT was the question for the better part of last week among Congressmen in Maharashtra. Son of the late S.B. Chavan, the 50-year-old MBA, has been thrust onto the centrestage as CM-designate. In the legislature party meeting in Mumbai, some party MLAs got themselves

Music To His Ears

THE BABA MILKS THE PRAISE. WHEN THE CONGRESS DOES well, it's a given that the sycophants have to fall over each other in giving Rahul Gandhi all the credit. That time-honoured LP was playing again the day the state assembly results were announced. This time there was even a gentleman wandering around the Congress HQ on Akbar Road distributing a CD with the title: 'Hope of India: Rahul Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi'. The singer-songwriter, a regular on the Congress loyalists circuit, had a free run of the party HQ, button-holing even the senior leaders. He said he was hoping the PM would launch his CD full of songs in praise of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira and the rest of the Congress pantheon. The veteran Gandhi caps lounging around were heard promising that they would help (it does no one any disservice to promote a few paens to Rahul). Strangely, the album cover credits rail mantri Laloo Yadav as a source of inspiration. Otherwise priced at Rs 50, copies can be picked up for free at the Congress HQ. ■



Cartoons by SANDEEP ADHWARYU

introduced to him for the first time. That said, not starting with a reputation may be a good thing in post-terror attack Mumbai. The question now is: will he survive? Soft-spoken Chavan is hardly a match for his deputy, the belligerent Chhagan

Bhujbal, or new home minister Jayant Patil. Both are from the NCP, and they take orders only from Sharad Pawar. Meanwhile, there is the Congress's Narayan Rane threatening on the horizon. "I don't need a character certificate from

Rane," muttered Chavan the day he was sworn in. Indeed, uneasy times ahead. ■

A Red Rash

V.S. ACHUTHANANDAN, THE Kerala CM, is having a torrid time of it. The latest: political secretary K.N. Balagopal turns against him at the CPI(M) state committee meeting. Incidentally, it was the same gent who goofed up in the Maj Unnikrishnan incident. The man simply forgot to convey Achumama's condolence message to the martyred NSG commando's family! ■





Toss Out That Cookie-Cutter

Readymade analysis fails, for the aam voter isn't easily swayed

EACH election in India is a rebuff to those who read India and its politics according to the simple patterns in their own mind. That this round of assembly polls spawned its fair share of pop analyses that self-destructed is by itself no surprise. But the overlap—and in some cases, simultaneity—of the polling process with the attack in Mumbai offered a grander scale of error. As voting in four out of five states succeeded the terror drama, the instant judgement of the chattering classes mirrored their own latent national chauvinism: terrorism, they said, would be the overriding issue with the voters. Indeed, opinion polls even asserted the Mumbai attack would be the biggest factor in the Lok Sabha elections, still months away. To give due credit, there were columnists who saw the high voter turnout for what it was. They recognised that the aam admi did not share—and thankfully so for Indian democracy—the outrage of the chattering classes against politics. Yet these columnists too could not suggest that the masses would vote with cool-headed calculation even in the wake of such momentous tragedy, and not be swayed by the kind of confused, irrational emotions the elite betrayed when hit by a crisis. It is not that the rural voter does not understand the gravity of the threat posed by terrorism; even the aam urban Delhi voter paid no attention to the BJP's last-lap aggressive campaign on the issue.

There are Congress leaders who would like us to believe their party could have done better in Madhya Pradesh were it not for the fact that the state saw polling when the terror attacks were still on. Congress spokesperson Shakeel Ahmed said so on a news channel, arguing that the effect of the attack waned by the time Delhi and Rajasthan voters voted. But this is an obviously lame excuse—an attempt to draw a connection where none exists. Its speciousness is exposed by the fact that the Congress score was sub-par also in neighbouring Chhattisgarh, which had two phases of polling before November 26. People who closely followed the election campaigns can vouch that voters reached their decisions the only way they should—after careful weighing of options presented to them, and not under the influ-

ence of any mass hysteria of the last minute. Even in the face of a major crisis, it is quite clear that the aam admi has shown much more maturity than the Indian elite.

How do we explain this schism in our body social, the split between, to borrow another cliché, India and Bharat? We have an elite that has lost somewhere along the way the nerve to lead by example and the willingness to share the fruits of progress. It has pampered itself to grow soft and selfish. For self-advancement, it has learnt to control and manipulate resources, both material and human, and forgotten what fortitude means. In times of crisis, therefore, it panics, grows hysterical and, like a mindless herd, votes with its feet instead of gritting its teeth and digging its heels in. On the other hand, for the aam admi, there is an element of crisis in everyday survival. This breeds, besides a stoic

courage, a will to engage and a serious weighing of limited options available on the table. Escape is not an option, there is always a decision to be made—good or bad. The aam admi has to vote with his mind, not with his feet.

It is also high time that we exorcise that other cliché—'anti-incumbency'—from the tools of electoral analysis. Out of five states, three have returned their governments, and it is not something new that has happened. At various points in the past too, these states have returned incumbent governments. For instance, Madhya Pradesh had returned Digvijay Singh for a second term in

1998, Rajasthan returned Bhairon Singh Shekhawat for a second term in 1993 and Delhi has been returning Sheila Dikshit for quite some time now. You go further into the past, and these states will show more examples of pro-incumbency than of anti-incumbency. And elsewhere in India too, there would be numerous such examples: for how many years now has the BJP been ruling Gujarat and the CPI(M) West Bengal, for how many terms did the RJD retain Bihar, or the Telugu Desam hold sway in Andhra Pradesh? You will go on finding examples galore, yet we keep talking of anti-incumbency as the default factor, and other examples as exceptions. It is nothing but the mental lethargy of the apolitical that seeks readymade explanations instead of trying to understand how the voter responds to the performance of incumbent governments. The Indian elite must begin to engage seriously with what real democracy is. ■



QUICKPIX



WHY THE WHITE FLAG

- The influential Sun TV and *Dinakaran*, both owned by the Marans, were turning against the Karunanidhi government.
- The Marans' media groups were also reporting the spectrum scam involving Union telecom minister A. Raja of the DMK.
- Sun TV was devoting telecast time to DMK rivals like Jayalalitha.
- Battling incumbency, the DMK needs the support of the Marans. A family divided spells trouble for the party.

Happy again?

Karunanidhi, his two sons, and the Marans after the reconciliation

GRUDGE CONTROL

More than anything, political contingency dictated this reunion

by Pushpa Iyengar

It seemed better than the many soaps on Sun TV. And to top it, there was deep political significance to this mother of all reunions—Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi and his clan burying differences with his grand-nephews, the Marans.

The rapprochement, scripted by the DMK chief's daughter, Selvi, was intended to unite the warring factions and strengthen the party, which, many insiders believed, would be hurt by the feud in the long run. But the question is whether the truce will hold beyond the general elections next year.

That the Karunanidhi government is under great pressure is an understatement. Fighting anti-incumbency, it is on the defensive over the price rise, the

severe power cuts in the state and the Sri Lankan Tamil issue. The DMK's main adversary, the AIADMK, has stitched up an alliance with Karunanidhi's old and trusted friends—the CPI(M) and the CPI—for the Lok Sabha polls. Vijayakanth, of the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), who got 8.33 per cent of the vote in the last assembly election, is still keeping his options

open, although he too has given positive signals to the Left. But the problem is that there may not be enough room in the so-called Third Front for his and Jayalalitha's egos to cohabit. Still, his concerted campaign against the government on the power issue makes him a potential value addition to the AIADMK-Left formation.

Two weeks ago, Dayanidhi Maran, former Union technology minister, was on the verge of being turfed out of the DMK, after his brother, Kalanidhi, made a point-by-point rebuttal of the charges levelled by Karunanidhi in DMK mouthpiece *Murasoli*. Karunanidhi cleverly ran a sepia-tinted picture of him holding the hands of the young Maran brothers to underline their betrayal. At the same

ROAD TO TRUCE

Nov 2003: After Murasoli Maran's death, differences crop up between the Marans and the Karunanidhi clan.

Nov 2004: Karunanidhi asks wife to offload shares in Sun TV.

Mar 1, 2007: Maran-owned paper *Dinakaran* carries a picture of a chimp in a San Diego zoo that has the same birthday as Karunanidhi's son M.K. Stalin.

May 9, 2007: *Dinakaran* poll says DMK chief's elder son, Azhagiri, unpopular. The paper's Madurai office attacked.

May 13, 2007: DMK chief tells Dayanidhi to resign from Union cabinet.

June 3, 2008: Azhagiri prevents Marans from meeting Karunanidhi on the patriarch's 84th birthday

June 9, 2008: Azhagiri's Royal Cable Vision (rcv) launched in Madurai. Sun TV channels blocked in Madurai.

July 23, 2008: Sun TV files a petition in Madras high court seeking a direction to the home secretary to instruct officials to receive complaints against rcv for

illegally tapping Sun's signal.

Sept 2008: Sun TV goes "neutral". Covers Jayalalitha's meeting live.

Nov 21, 2008: Feud reaches a new level with Karunanidhi hurling several charges against the Marans in the DMK organ, *Murasoli*. Kalanidhi responds to charges with unexpected vehemence.

Nov 30, 2008: Kalaingar TV launches news channel to counter Sun TV.

Dec 1, 2008: The grand reconciliation of the two warring families.

time, he pointed out in his article that he was badly hurt by three things: the Marans' demand that his family offload their shares in Sun TV Network for Rs 100 crore; the publication of an opinion poll in the Maran-owned *Dinakaran* that put Azhagiri at the bottom as a potential CM; and the vandalising of the Sun TV office in Anna Arivalayam, the DMK headquarters, while vacating it.

Kalanidhi countered that it was Karunanidhi who had insisted on the change in shareholding patterns. He also said he had 200 photographs to prove that Anna Arivalayam was returned in an "as is where is condition." His letter to the CM said he had been silent so far, "but, today, when you made false charges through the press, we are unable to bear them."

ACCORDING to party insiders, Kalanidhi Maran's belligerent rejoinder contributed to the DMK patriarch's rethink.

Having the powerful Marans, who own Sun TV, the largest network in Tamil Nadu, as enemies would not help the DMK in any way. So, not surprisingly, Karunanidhi's initials stands for Selvi's rapprochement plan. Says Tamil writer and DMK watcher S. Gnani: "The 'M' in Karunanidhi's initials stands for money, muscle and media. He had the first two, but realised that with his coalition weakening after the exit of the PMK and the Left, he needed the media clout of the



Swinging leftwards Jayalalitha with Karat

Marans." He says the Marans have clearly won the first round as it is they who have forced Karunanidhi to give in.

Either way, the Karunanidhi family is relieved that the war is over. Sun TV and the Maran-owned newspaper *Dinakaran* (circulation: 10 lakh) had become a thorn in the party's flesh. Everything Karunanidhi did and did not do was criticised. His rivals, like Jayalalitha, Vijayakanth and MDMK's Vaiko, were given coverage, particularly when they targeted Azhagiri. "Since the reunion, while Sun TV continues to cover other leaders, the focus on the spectrum scam involving DMK's Union telecommunications minister A. Raja has gone. So has criticism of the government and Azhagiri," says a DMK source.

In fact, the Karunanidhi family had started Kalaingar TV to counter Sun TV after the feud broke out. But that move

didn't quite pay off. Viewership was poor and the channel was not a patch on the one run by Maran. The latter's news programming actually became more "objective" as Sun also ran anti-government/DMK stories. The advantage for the Marans is that they have bought peace of mind, with Azhagiri not eating into their media empire. There is talk that they may take over rcv, started by Azhagiri in Madurai to counter the Marans' local Sumangali Cable Vision.

Political rivals believe that the rapprochement was merely one of convenience. Asks Jayalalitha, "What are the terms of the settlement? As long as the war was going on, he (Karananidhi) was acting like a war correspondent. Now, he has the duty to report on the terms of the ceasefire." Cho Ramaswamy, editor of the satirical *Thuglaq*, underlined that money drove the families apart and money brought about the reconciliation. "Avarice is the motto of the Karunanidhi clan," he says.

No one believes that the truce will last. For one, Kanimozhi, the most photographed politician of the family, was missing from the happy family portrait of December 2. And for another, within days, Dayanidhi was left out of the CM's delegation to Delhi this week to discuss the Lankan issue with the Centre. In fact, Kanimozhi was the prominent face beside her father during his meetings with the PM and Congress president Sonia Gandhi. Those looking for a 'happily ever after' ending to the story will have to look elsewhere. ■

by John Mary

KUMARAKOM, on the banks of the Vembanad lake, has for long been a very public face on the 'God's own country' brochures. It's a very popular tourist destination in the southern Kerala district of Kottayam, as famous for its kayal (lake) and karimeen (pearl spotted fish) as the rich, dense landscape.

Farming, fishing, mining lime from the lakebed and, of late, tourism, have been the main livelihood of the people here. Tourism has grown at a frenetic pace, for Kumarakom, built on reclaimed land, gives the best panoramic view of the 96-km-long Vembanad-Kol wetland estuarine system. However, the land has come under increasing stress. Monsoons bring huge quantities of pesticides and other pollutants into the fragile system. This has led to the fish population shrinking and swamps mushrooming. In fact, over the years, the Vembanad which spread out over 36,329 hectares in 1834 has shrunk to 12,504 hectares now.

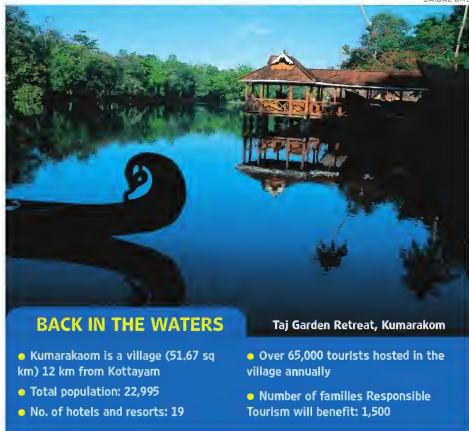
Hotels and resorts still came up because on the surface everything looked picture-perfect. Local NGOs, planners, biologists and economists, who recognised how fragile the ecosystem was, have been warning for long that immediate steps were required to check the environmental downside. But nothing much happened till the state government, realising the havoc over-exploitation of natural resources was bringing about, decided to announce a pilot scheme earlier this year for RT (Responsible Tourism) at four places—Kumarakom, Kovalam, Kumily in Idukki and the northern Wayanad district.

The Kumarakom experiment is already being projected as a success story. RT, in essence, seeks to minimise negative economic, environmental and social impacts, while generating greater economic benefits for locals. It also focuses on linking up the local economy with the industry. Locals are also now part of the decision-making process. The multi-layered mechanism has a dis-

LAKE PLACID

Responsible Tourism, it's working for Kerala

SAIBAL DAS



BACK IN THE WATERS

Taj Garden Retreat, Kumarakom

- Kumarakom is a village (51.67 sq km) 12 km from Kottayam
- Total population: 22,995
- No. of hotels and resorts: 19
- Over 65,000 tourists hosted in the village annually
- Number of families Responsible Tourism will benefit: 1,500

tract-level RT committee with the gram panchayat supervising, the Kudumbasree Mission taking care of production, coordination and funding while the tourism department liaises with hotels. The committee also has on board NGOs and public representatives.

Micro-enterprises comprising five members each were formed for cultivating a variety of crops, with bank assistance and Kudumbasree subsidy. Most of the farmers and fishermen in the target village (comprising 1,500 families) joined in as the RT Activity Group marketed whatever was produced.

But the Kumarakom hotels, despite agreeing to buy the local produce, took time to change. Still, latest figures show that chamber members have bought Rs 4 lakh worth of local vegetables and fruits. RT coordinator Rupesh Kumar says they "are now concentrating on the

economics but the next step is preservation of Kumarakom's ecology".

The resorts have also realised that bonding with the locals is a good thing. A telling result has been that they have chipped in with Rs 12.8 lakh for a new project to solve the perennial drinking water shortage in the area. Says Saji Joseph, GM, Radisson Kumarakom, "We are in the tourism industry. The RT initiative is the best guarantee that our business will endure. Many other tourist hotspots that have gone to the dogs from over-exploitation of resources."

The Kumarakom experiment is the latest chapter in Kerala's efforts on the sustainable development front. Unlike Kovalam and the high-range Kumily and Wayanad, where the initiative was launched simultaneously, Kumarakom is where economists and environmentalists are looking for success stories. ■

T. NARAYAN



At what cost? A polluted Yamuna

LOG JAM STREET

Ecological costs can deflate the GDP's bounce

by Debarshi Dasgupta

FOR a country riding on a high of double-digit growth projections, it is a sobering thought. A group of economic and environment

experts have got together to propose a new model of calculating the GDP that factors in the cost of environmental degradation arising out of development. This has so far been kept out of the economic calculus. The Green Accounting for Indian States Project (GAISP) lowers our GDP figures considerably—by at least six per cent for the country and as much as 20 per cent for Himachal Pradesh—and should initiate a debate on the real cost of our progress.

To understand the model better, one needs to see the destruction of forests not just as value addition to GDP in terms of logging—as under the current method—but also as a loss of a forest's latent value. These may include the forest's ability to control floods, recharge groundwater, trap carbon, produce non-timber goods, shelter biodiversity and gen-

erate tourism. With these taken away by logging, the country's GDP has to be lowered by 2.52 per cent. Similarly, poor farming practices generates a cost by causing groundwater depletion and soil degradation. This cost, GAISP says, equals to 1.57 per cent of India's GDP.

Argues Sanjeev Sanyal of the Delhi-based Green Indian States Trust, who co-founded the green accounting model, "We need a different parameter of measuring human economic progress that takes into account true value addition by recognising the destruction of natural

capital." The rationale is to monetise natural capital so that development trade-offs can be effectively decided. For instance, would it be worth having a dam that generates a cost of, say, Rs 500 crore by destroying the whole forest cover?

"Environmental debate happens outside the parameters of the economic system. We have made the same argument within it," Sanyal adds. While misallocation of funds has led to the ongoing financial crisis, Sanyal points out the ongoing misallocation of natural capital on a "colossal scale" is likely to lead us to something far worse. "There is a parallel to these two and this is the reason we are arguing that we are headed for crises such as climate change," he says.

The ongoing project will also document health-related costs and those arising out of mining. It also looks into positives such as education that is seen not as an expenditure but investment in human capital. The model is currently being put to use for the first time internationally by the German federal ministry for the environment and the European Commission to put together a global study called The Economics of Ecosystems & Biodiversity (TEEB). It will measure costs of the loss of biodiversity and the associated decline in ecosystem services worldwide, and is being led by Pavan Sukhdev, who co-founded the green accounting model with Sanyal.

Gaurav Gupta, country director of the Al Gore-led Climate Project, says the model measures our environmental impact more precisely. "That may lead to better initiatives in mitigating the damage and decarbonising our economies." The project has not arrived at any reworked growth rates because it has not used data from different time periods. However, Sanyal says, "It is reasonable that once you account for all these environmental costs, our GDP growth rate in the recent past has been significantly under 9 per cent." But will India switch to this green GDP model? That may be a tough call. "There is no conceptual opposition to our framework but the problem is with people's apathy towards environmental costs," Sanyal concludes. ■

GDP REWORKED

5.9% reduction in GDP if eco-damage is accounted for

1.57% additional lowering if agricultural damage is included

9% growth rate of the GDP would have to be lowered substantially

22.2% reduction in UP's GDP if eco-damage is considered

The Planning Commission has seen a presentation of the green model

'It's necessary info, but spectrum data is not made available to TRAI'



The spectrum scam has pitted Union telecom minister A. Raja against the sector's regulator, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). Both have diametrically opposite views on the government's decision to issue telecom licences on a first-come-first-served basis in November 2007, which has led to an alleged loss of Rs 60,000 crore to the exchequer. In an interview with Arindam Mukherjee, TRAI chairman Nripendra Mishra sticks to his stand that the regulator hasn't recommended this route. Excerpts:

Why is there ambiguity over the first-come-first-served policy?

My observations are not to be seen as a comment or counter-comment on government decisions. However, there is an issue—the first-come-first-served policy—on which there is a lot of confusion. Let me clarify that no such phrase for sanction of licence has been mentioned anywhere in any recommendation of TRAI. But as an administrative practice, it is followed in the wpc (Wireless Planning & Coordination) wing for spectrum allocation. There, this is followed and it does not require TRAI recommendation.

Fine. But why was spectrum not auctioned?

Licence on the basis of auction has been the recommendation of TRAI since 2001. That never changed. It was recommended in 2001 and 2003, and repeated in 2007. Often there is confusion because some people talk of auction of licence and auction of spectrum. Auction of 2G spectrum refers to 800, 900 and 1,800

band, and for the sake of a level playing field, we cannot auction the remaining quantum of spectrum in these bands as it was bundled with the 2G licences. However, we have said that for all other bands, spectrum should be auctioned because that was not bundled with the Universal Access Service Licence (UASL). **You have said that the licence fee shouldn't be maintained at the 2001 level. But the telecom minister says this view hasn't been recommended by TRAI...**

The TRAI position since 2000 has been that since spectrum is bundled with the 2G licences, there is no separate spectrum price. And the licence price has to be determined through a market mechanism. It was done in 2001 and 2002. After that, licences were given only to those licencees who wanted a pan-India presence. The dynamics of the telecom sector have changed significantly in terms of subscriber growth and circles. The areas for which no bids

"TRAI does not recommend any 'first-come-first-served' policy. Let me clarify that no such phrase is mentioned."



"The telecom sector's dynamics have changed significantly. So we recommend that licences be given via market mechanism."

came earlier have now become frontrunners in terms of growth in numbers of subscribers. So we recommended that licences may be given through a market mechanism.

Why was the number of players per circle not restricted?

The policy said that we cannot determine the number of players in a circle and that the market should determine the number subject to availability of spectrum for existing players' growth—as well as for start-up and growth of new players. Between 2004 and 2006, of all the applications that came in, 99 per cent were from those who already had a licence and were looking for expansion. In 2007, the picture changed and there were applications from new players.

The minister has told Outlook that, contrary to perception, huge spectrum is available. Is there actually a shortage of spectrum?

The most challenging aspect in the telecom sector is spectrum management. The availability of spectrum is necessary information for the working of TRAI but traditionally, this information is not available to TRAI. In 2006 and 2007, we had said that information about spectrum availability should not only be made available to TRAI but should be put in the public domain. But it is not shared with TRAI.

The minister also mentioned that there is an undisclosed cartel of players...

I will not comment on that. There are other bodies to look into the matter like the MRTPC. ■

by Mariana Baabar in Islamabad

IT was early on December 8, Monday morning, a little over 24 hours before the country was to celebrate Id, and villagers on the outskirts

of Muzaffarabad, Kashmir, were waking from their sleep to the clatter of gunship helicopters. On the ground, in freezing temperatures, heavily armed security personnel had begun their raids, swooping down on madrassas and relief camps of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), a charity organisation headed by Prof Hafiz Saeed, better known as founder of the banned militant organisation, Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT). Sporadic shots were heard, but there were no major reports of a prolonged gunbattle, normally associated with such military operations.

As the day rolled on, rumours flew thick and fast. One reason was the reluctance of officials to confirm the raids. It was said the ambit of the crackdown had been widened beyond Muzaffarabad to include JuD offices in Manshera and Chakdara in the Frontier province, as also in other towns of Punjab. Only when TV channels began to flash that LeT's Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi (who India accuses of masterminding the Mumbai carnage) had been detained did Maj Gen Athar Abbas, D-G, Inter Service Press Relations, confirm the news: "This is an intelligence-led operation against banned militant outfits and organisations." The JuD, as is commonly known, is the front organisation for the LeT, which was banned in 2002.

A day later, there was yet another 'breakeing news' event—Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Maulana Masood Azhar had been confined to his multi-storeyed residence-cum-office complex in the Model Town area of Bahawalpur, Punjab. Released by the Indian government in the prisoners-for-hostages swap during the 1C-814 hijack in 1999, the man had not been seen in public for long, not even at the Model Town complex. This is the same Azhar who was openly escorted by his ISI handlers around Karachi, in the days following his release in

HOW MANY NEEDLES CAN THE VOODOO DOLL TAKE?

Under pressure, Pakistan moves to crack down on terror outfits. But on the ground, is there enough support for such an action?

"Weren't we informed earlier that all these 'patriotic' warriors were murdering our people and soldiers?"



Ayesha Siddiqi
Pak army historian

"If the ISI has been foolish enough to have participated in the Mumbai blasts, they must be punished too."



Lt Gen Asad Durrani
Ex-DG, Military Intelligence



Jan 9, 2000 Maulana Masood Azhar arrives in Bahawalpur after his release by India

1999. Not for nothing do Pakistanis view Azhar's Jaish and Saeed's Lashkar as the Pakistan army's proxies. Intermittently accused in India of fomenting terrorism on its soil, the two outfits were last heard of during the 2005 quake. They were commended widely for their relief operations in a devastated 'Azad' Kashmir; even a few international NGOs applauded their efforts.

So it's no surprise that many are now asking: did the army really have to do a chopper raid on offices of organisations earlier touted to have been engaged only in social welfare? Have Islamabad and the army effected a U-turn on the Lashkar and Jaish, as they had done on the Taliban in the days following 9/11? Did pressure from the United States, acting at India's behest, prove to be too much for Islamabad? To these questions is linked a most important one: has the establishment finally decided to reverse its policy of nurturing proxies

to promote its interests in India? The jury is out, but the initial verdict is that the crackdown would have been a bit more credible had it been taken before Mumbai began to groan from wounds inflicted on November 26.

President Asif Ali Zardari may have gained a few brownie points through his *New York Times* article, 'The terrorists want to destroy Pakistan too', but it still won't make up for the snowballing resentment his government set off with its botched decision to send the ISI chief to Delhi. Ex-ISI chief Lt Col Hamid Gul, who's himself under the US scanner (see box), bristled to *Outlook*, "Pakistan is not India's colony that (you can say) they have summoned our D-G ISI. And to think Prime Minister Yusuf Gilani, without a second thought, announced he was going to send him. India has simply no proof of Pakistan's involvement in the Mumbai attacks... and their response to the attacks was very immature." Throw-

ing the ball back in India's court, Gul continued, "The Indian Lt Col involved in the Samjhauta attack should be tried publicly and the Pakistani media should travel to India to cover his trial."

In the week following the reversal of the ISI chief decision, the government took to belatedly arresting leaders of militant outfits. This measure sparked off a blame game, with many accusing ex-president Pervez Musharraf and his US handlers of bolstering groups like the Lashkar. As the English daily *Dawn* wrote, "If it has grown to a position of such strength that it could execute the Mumbai attacks with consummate ease, it hasn't done so in a vacuum. The Lashkar's capabilities grew on the watch of Gen Musharraf. The US has remained a silent spectator, keen not to upset a fading dictator. So militancy is a problem in the region not only because of Pakistan's numerous sins of commission but also because of the sins of the US, whose interests in Afghanistan led it to back a ruler who made neither Pakistan nor the region safer."

Blaming Musharraf is perhaps the easiest way out for most Pakistanis. His exit from the President's House hasn't brought about a dramatic change in the situation. As tensions over an impending conflict on the Pak-Indo border mounted (because of the 'hoax' call from Delhi), the army organised a background briefing to tell journalists that Baitullah Mehsud, Mulla Fazlullah and Jalaluddin Haqqani—militant leaders fighting the army in the tribal areas—were patriots who won't hesitate to rush to the country's eastern border to constitute the frontline against India. Earlier, these same militants were said to be on India's payroll; Mehsud was even accused of assassinating Benazir Bhutto. When these facts were pointed out at the briefing, the military spokesman ascribed such accusations to a misunderstanding.

Writer Ayesha Siddiqi, an authority on the Pakistan military, was livid about the briefing: "Had the official concerned studied international politics in any depth, he'd have realised that such a statement could be interpreted in numer-

'THE US WANTS INDIA IN AFGHANISTAN'

The ex-ISI chief is still full of bluster, wanted on the so-called American terror note or not

FOR the record, former ISI chief Hamid Gul isn't facing heat because of the Mumbai carnage. In a secret two-page document the United States sent to Pakistan and the United Nations Security Council, Washington has recommended that Gul and four other officials be included in the list of international terrorists. The charges? They have helped the Taliban mount attacks in Afghanistan.

Gul scoffs at the suggestion that Washington's recommendation followed the Mumbai attacks. "I was on the so-called international terrorist list much before the Mumbai attacks," he declares. But isn't he perturbed? He guffaws and says, "Absolutely not. This is both fallacious and inaccurate. What can one say about this US report which cannot even get my address, passport number and



JITENDER GUPTA

No change Ex-ISI chief Hamid Gul

other personal facts right?"

So is he hoping for assistance from the Zardari government? "This government is lost. I talked to foreign minister Mehmood Shah Qureshi and he appeared preoccupied and replied, 'I really do not know anything.'" He feels the neo-cons in the US have named him in the secret document

because of an ulterior motive. "They have very few days left. Now they are trying to embroil Barack Obama in the conflict so that he does not succeed in the programme of 'change' that he has promised the American people. It's a clear conspiracy against Obama," Gul told *Outlook*.

The ex-ISI chief also takes pride in the fact that he still has friends in Afghanistan, even among the ruling alliance. "I've great admiration for the Afghans who have put up such a magnificent defence of their nation. I have no hesitation in saying that I believe that the US is the aggressor in Afghanistan," he confesses.

Gul also cautions India against jumping on what he calls the sinking ship of the US. "The US wants to get India onboard inside Afghanistan and are seeking 1,50,000 extra troops there." ■

ous ways. Furthermore, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan's statement swearing allegiance to the Pakistani state that followed the official's observation is likely to raise greater suspicion in the international community. And hadn't we been informed earlier that all these 'patriotic' warriors were in fact murdering Pakistani's people and its brave soldiers?"

The winds blowing in Pakistan, it seems, have changed direction. Here's what former DG, military intelligence, Lt Gen Asad Durrani, considered as shrewd an army strategist as any, told *Outlook*, "I really do not know if these organisations are involved in the Mumbai attacks. If any links are established, then whether they belong to the government or are non-state actors, they should be arrested and prosecuted. We already have enough trouble on our western borders. There's no point having trouble on the eastern borders as well. Even if for argument's sake these proxies were involved, then we shouldn't only punish them but also eliminate them. There are plenty of

examples in history where proxies have been used and eliminated."

Durrani has little patience with even the ISI, should there be solid evidence about its involvement in Mumbai. "If the ISI is foolish enough to have participated, then it too should be punished. It is the state of Pakistan that has suffered most after Mumbai," he argues. He dismisses suggestions that action against the Lashkar and Jaish will push them to direct their wrath against the government (a blowback similar to what happened once the army began its operations in the tribal areas). As he puts it, "The only guts they have shown in the

last eight years is to attack their own people. People will not come out on the streets to support them. If you can't handle this situation, then you will have to pay a price," he warns.

It's still too early to tell whether action against the militants will take a permanent turn. Will the proxies return to business once the threat from India subsides? Columnist Dr Faruq Salim says every nation employs proxies to further its interests—Reagan harnessed jihadis to defeat Russia, Bush the Northern Alliance to undermine the Taliban, and India uses the Balochistan Liberation Army to undermine Pakistan. Claiming that these proxies could have acted on their own, Salim said, "There's no precedent of handing them over and they have not committed any crime in Pakistan for us to put them on trial. In realpolitik, countries use non-state actors to bolster their foreign policy aims. So does Pakistan." In other words, the Indians cannot seriously be expecting Islamabad to hand over the proxies to them. ■

"WE ALREADY HAVE ENOUGH trouble on our western borders. There is no need for more trouble on the east."

WHEN FEAR DIDN'T ENTER THE BOOTH



Bogey-raisers fell to the stolid, pragmatic voter's sense

by **Saba Naqvi**

THE BJP has clearly bungled on terrorism. Long used to chest-thumping and claiming that it feels “more strongly” about terrorism than other parties, the BJP, however, ended up losing two states that voted in a fortnight dominated by the Mumbai terror strike. And as if to underline that miscalculation, the two BJP chief ministers who won—Shivraj Chauhan in Madhya Pradesh and Raman Singh in Chhattisgarh—happened to have done so on the strength of their quiet performances, and not for seeking vengeance against terrorists in particular and Muslims in general.

Why, then, did the BJP fail in tapping familiar prejudices in Delhi and Rajasthan? Why did its attempts to stir the old mix of ‘Muslim equals terrorist equals Pakistani’ prove counter-

productive and in fact help the Congress in Delhi? First, there's a distinction between homegrown and international terror, which the voter could clearly see. Second, many of the victims were Muslims. The non-stop TV coverage of the Mumbai attack drove home both these facts.

On target? Mumbaikars at a vigil after the terror attack

A.P.



When It
Worked

1984

General elections
In the aftermath of the Indira Gandhi assassination and the anti-Sikh riots that followed, the Congress unleashed a campaign with the subtext that the Sikh next door could be a terrorist. The Congress won a landslide victory.

1995

Maharashtra polls
The Shiv Sena-BJP combine won this election, which came two years after the

1993 serial blasts in Mumbai. Its electoral campaign promised to book those guilty of terrorism and was marked by strong Hindutva and anti-Pakistan rhetoric.

1998

General elections
After the Coimbatore blasts, which had L.K. Advani among its possible targets, the BJP capitalised on the terror plank and ended up winning five Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu for the first time. It also released an ad asking people if terrorists should be fed biryani (a reference to the government's poor handling of the siege by Kashmiri militants of

the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar). The BJP came to power, winning 182 seats.

1999

General elections
Riding high on a nationalist plank after the Kargil war, the BJP won 182 seats. Its campaign promised a tough state that would crack down on infiltrators and anti-nationals.

2002

Gujarat assembly
Held after the Gujarat riots, this election was dominated by Narendra Modi's personality. With Godhra as pretext, he directed his anti-terror rhetoric against Pakistan and



A Bajrang Dal activist during the Gujarat riots

Muslims. The BJP won 127 of the 182 assembly seats.

2008

Karnataka assembly
BJP released an ad campaign trying to capitalise on terror incidents in the state like the attack on the Indian Institute of Science. It managed to come to power in the state.

When It
Didn't

2002

Punjab elections

The BJP's campaign revolved around terror after the December 13 Parliament attack. But it won only three seats.

2007

UP elections

The BJP tried to whip up voter sympathy by raising the terror attack in Benares as an issue. It came a poor third behind the BSP and the SP.

2008

Delhi and Rajasthan elections

Post 26/11, BJP failed to wrest Delhi from the Congress despite its "blood-stained" campaign focusing on the government's failure to prevent terror attacks. In Rajasthan too, it lost.

What's more—and this is something all politicians are learning—the electorate is no longer fooled by sham posturing, especially on issues as important as terror. The BJP's own record in fighting terror has been unimpressive, so its theatrics seem even less credible. Historian Ramachandra Guha says, "I don't think you can fool people for so long. So many terror attacks took place under BJP-NDA watch. Then, L.K. Advani, at around 80 years of age, has done many flip-flops and hardly looks a decisive leader, while Narendra Modi's offer of money to slay ATS officer Hemant Karkare's widow was in bad taste."

"I don't think you can fool people for long. Many terror attacks took place under the BJP-NDA watch. And Advani hardly looks decisive."



Ramachandra Guha, historian



Dipankar Gupta, sociologist

"The BJP are fools if they think there's something called a terror card that can be produced during polls like a magic trick."

2008: WHEN PROMISING POLL PLANKS APPEARED AND FADED



The Ram Setu controversy was raked up in 2007 and peaked in 2008...



...but it was overshadowed by the Amarnath land transfer in May 2008.



The N-deal seemed poll-worthy, but it fizzled out by Nov 2008.



Few recall the cash-for-votes scam of July 2008.



Terror attacks in Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai.



Inflation and the global meltdown failed to have a political impact.

look tough, and perhaps that seems to them even more important than calmly coming up with serious counter-terror measures. In other words, enormities like Mumbai 26/11 do provoke political grandstanding.

But sociologist Dipankar Gupta argues that the terror card works only when there is the threat of secession. "(Terror) has been flogged far too often and mostly it hasn't worked at all. The BJP are fools if they think there's a terror card that can be produced at election time like a magic trick and made to work," he says. And what about phenomena like Narendra Modi?

"Mumbai 26/11 did impact the Delhi electorate...but they voted on local choices. It helped Cong that Sheila Dikshit was seen as acceptable."



G.V.L. Narasimha Rao, pollster for BJP

"He's a different story—a leader who combines personality with regional pride," says Gupta. That is to say, charismatic leaders can make all sorts of issues work for them.

In contrast, the BJP's projected leader in Delhi, V.K. Malhotra, was an unmitigated disaster who, after the Mumbai attack, added to the public's revulsion for politicians by declaring that if he came to power, he would hang Afzal Guru within a week. This crude reaction from an aging leader—who did not inspire confidence in the first place—put people off. Instead of a dignified response, a few BJP leaders appeared to be salivating at

"BJP has been screaming itself hoarse about terror for a long time. Terror is an abiding theme in BJP campaigns and will remain so."



Sushil Pandit, BJP ad campaign manager

the possibilities. The party's campaign sank like a stone.

In Rajasthan there was a last-minute attempt to capitalise on 26/11. But the anti-Vasundhararaje mood had already gathered steam and local factors dominated in the overwhelmingly rural state, where it was too much to expect the Mumbai card to yield any dividend. Also, the terrorist attack in Jaipur, earlier this year, had seen the state intelligence being partly blamed. So the efforts to raise the terror issue failed.

There is a fascinating insight from psephologist G.V.L. Narasimha Rao, who has conducted in-house surveys for the BJP. He says that in August this year, the BJP would have got a two-thirds majority in Delhi. But that turned 180 degrees after Malhotra's name was announced. The leadership was informed that it would have been better not to project any one leader. Now, Rao says, "I will say that the Mumbai terror attack did impact the Delhi electorate. The middle class was motivated to vote but they voted for local choices. It helped the Congress, for Sheila Dikshit looked like a much better face." He says the rural voter, in any case, votes on local and caste considerations. "It is only among urban voters that the terror card can work. But people should not assume this will automatically help only the BJP."

One BJP insider jokes that "people were protesting against terrorism, but they were even more scared of Malhotra becoming their chief minister". Sushil Pandit, who has handled many successful advertising campaigns for the BJP during elections, defends a blood-spattered ad released by the BJP in Delhi the day after the Mumbai attack. It was called distasteful, but Pandit says, "People seem to be reacting to this ad as if we rubbed our hands in glee after Mumbai and started to talk about terrorism. The fact, however, is that the BJP has been screaming itself hoarse about terrorism for quite



Guarded question Echoing the middle class, an ad takes a dig at politicians

"A certain dynamism in India now makes it impossible to manipulate voters. No one wants politics to be played with an issue like terrorism."



Gurcharan Das, Columnist



Murli Manohar Joshi, senior BJP leader

"We cannot conclude that terrorism is not an issue. But somehow it could not be highlighted properly by the BJP in two states."

a while. Terror is an abiding theme in BJP campaigns and will remain so."

Says senior BJP leader Dr Murli Manohar Joshi, "We cannot conclude that terrorism is not an issue. But somehow it could not be highlighted properly because of the deficiencies in the BJP's election management in the two states." But some rethinking has begun. The larger question confronting the party is whether it should downplay ideological issues and project itself on solely on governance. Today, Narendra Modi is arguably the only BJP leader who combines the development plank with a tough-on-terror image.

The other successful model emerging in the BJP is that of Raman Singh of Chhattisgarh, who won himself a second term without raising ideological issues or uttering the words 'Hindu', 'Muslim' or 'Christian'. He did crack down on Maoists, but also spoke of development programmes and the hugely popular Rs 3-per-kilo rice scheme. Even Shivraj Chauhan, who won with a huge margin in Madhya Pradesh, emphasised development and performance.

Columnist and author Gurcharan Das says that India has now attained what he calls a "certain dynamism" that makes it impossible for politicians to blatantly manipulate voters. "No one now wants politics to be played with an issue like terrorism. Indian Muslims were outraged too and they protested in their own way. They had a sense of India and (knew) the country was there to support them."

Could this have been a benchmark election, in which politicians were taught a lesson? The voter has certainly told the politician that fear-mongering will not work. Even positions that play on prejudices and identity politics have to be projected with caution and intelligence. At least one thing can be said with surety: it will be very difficult now to crudely exploit an act of global terror for political purposes. ■

THRICE THE SPICE

Development is the only mantra. Sheila pips the BJP again.

by Anuradha Raman

A few hours before the Delhi verdict became clear on December 8, frantic talks were on as senior Congress leaders tried to wean supposedly 'winning' BSP candidates to their fold. So uncertain was the mood in the

Congress camp (at least four BSP potentials had expressed a willingness to shift allegiance). But by 2 pm in the afternoon, the BSP men were forgotten. The negotiators from the Congress had stopped taking their calls.

In contrast, the mood in the BJP was initially upbeat. Party strategists believed that after two consecutive terms, the anti-incumbency factor would surely make the Congress buckle under, Sheila Dikshit or no Sheila Dikshit. Besides, the brains trust was pretty upbeat in the thought that the Mumbai carnage which, incidentally, came to an end the very day on which Delhi went to polls (November 29), would certainly swing the city voter to come out in big numbers for the saffron party.

They did come out in big numbers, but their voting preference proved the party managers had got it completely wrong. The results were clearly sub-par, as admitted by Delhi elections in-charge Arun Jaitley at a press briefing. What he did not mention was the party's inability to convincingly turn Vijay Kumar Malhotra into a saleable brand. As the days passed,

murmurs were getting louder that those denied party tickets had done more than their fair share to do the party in. But the uninspiring CM candidate was definitely part of the mix.

The story of how Delhi was won and lost makes for an interesting case study of two parties—one which put up a brave front in the full knowledge that it could lose, and the other sure of a victory, caught in a vortex of its own rhetoric. In fact, so sure was the Congress of losing Delhi that the party high command virtually gave free rein to Sheila Dikshit to pick and choose her men before the elections. (This was in sharp contrast to the municipal polls where the BJP had won, where Dikshit had openly carped about her hands being tied.)

For sure, her poll plank built around 'development' still struck a chord with voters. "Vikas ki dor, pade na kamzor (Let development not be weakened)" was the Congress battle-cry. And the campaign seemed to have worked well. With the Commonwealth games next year in Delhi, many felt she would be a more presentable CM. Others supported her for the success of the Delhi Metro. And women seemed to have warmed up to Dikshit's government subsidising the LPG hike

by Rs 40. Issues like the controversial bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor and inflation, which the BJP had raised, seemed to have had no major impact on the electorate.

So, is there a relation between electoral outcomes and governance? A city-based NGO, Satark Nagarik Sangathan (SNS),

Reign on A jubilant Sheila Dikshit, CM again for a third term

PARTY	2008	2003
INC	42	47
BJP	23	20
Others	4	3
TOTAL	69*	70

* Election not held for one seat

MADHYA PRADESH

WHY BJP WON: The party strategised effectively. Neutralised anti-incumbency by dropping over a third of its sitting MLAs. Shivraj Singh Chauhan was projected early as the CM candidate. His campaign included a 'Jan Aashirwad' yatra. Even before polls were announced, Chauhan had addressed over 1,000 meetings. Development was his main plank. Finally, the welfare schemes launched during his chief ministership helped the BJP win. Chauhan's down-to-earth image also went down well with voters.

WHY CONGRESS LOST: Too many cooks spoil the party. Suresh Pachauri, Kamal Nath, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Arjun Singh, Digvijay Singh, Ajay Singh...all heavy-

weights pulling in different directions. Their constant bids to undermine each other ensured that the party floundered in regions dominated by rivals.



PARTY	2008	2003
BJP	139	173
INC	69	38
BSP	7	2
Others	8	17
TOTAL	223*	230

* Results not declared for 7 seats

SPOILER'S TALE: Uma Bharati's BJS won just four seats. She lost. Even the BSP fared slightly better, with seven seats.

VICTOR-SPEAK: "Anti-incumbency is out. Pro-incumbency, in which political performance will be judged on good governance, is in."—Shivraj Singh Chauhan

K.S. Shaini in Bhopal



"THE MUMBAI ATTACKS ONLY SWAYED Muslim votes towards the Congress. Delhi is a city of minorities. Everyone equated BJP in power with retaliation."

Shahid Siddiqui,
BSP leader

filed over 60 RTI applications to gauge how well MLAs performed in their last term. The result shows that performance does matter although caste equations still work. Under the local area development fund, MLAs receive a non-lapsable Rs 2 crore every year. Chief minister Sheila Dikshit was the best, allocating Rs 8.7 crore on development works. She denied a ticket to sitting MLA Meera Bhardwaj who released only Rs 1.4 crore. While many from the BJP as well as the Congress won despite poor performance, SNS activists now say if a report card of elected representatives is brought out in time, there's no doubt it will help voters make wiser decisions.

When Mumbai happened, the BJP went full-steam ahead on the terror issue. This, many in the party now concede, may have switched off the voter. Says Shahid Siddiqui, formerly with the SP and now with the BSP (a party which was supposed to play spoiler and make a third consecutive win for the Congress difficult), "The Mumbai terror actually managed to sway a huge percentage of Muslim votes in favour of the Congress. Delhi is a city of minorities. So, everyone was scared that if the BJP comes to power there would be retaliation." The BSP, incidentally, doubled its voteshare to 13.8 per cent in the recent polls.

For the BJP, the loss of Delhi comes as a major blow. Nothing it did could prevent a Congress victory—even the fervent, last-minute appeal to voters from former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. ■

MIZORAM

WHY CONGRESS WON: After sitting 10 years in the opposition, the Congress plank was anti-incumbency. The Mizo National Front government had failed on several counts. It had lost all development focus and had not provided relief for distressed farmers. The Congress campaign focused on the shortcomings of the MNF government. The party's campaign also got a boost through the 'Gandhi magic'. Both Sonia and Rahul Gandhi campaigned in

the state and struck a chord with the voters, desperate for a change.

WHY MNF LOST: The rare Mautam famine caused by rodent hordes destroying crops led to the birth of the MNF in 1961. The same disaster revisited Mizoram and

literally wiped out the MNF in this election. CM T.T. Zoramthanga's regime was accused of misusing the Rs 120 crore central allocation for Mautam-hit farmers. The mood for change was so visible that many MNF leaders virtually threw in the towel much before the elections.

VICTOR-SPEAK: "We knew we would make a solid comeback. The rich were becoming richer and the poor poorer. Over 70 per cent of our farmers are battling poverty. Change was the call of the hour."—Lalthanhawla, Mizoram CM

Wasbir Hussain in Guwahati



PARTY	2008	2003
INC	32	12
MNF	3	21
Others	5	7
TOTAL	40	40



RAJASTHAN:

Fractions Subtract Themselves

THE Rajasthan verdict provides interesting insights into the question of leadership. The defeat of BJP's Vasundhararaje had actually been on the cards, according to informed party sources. Raje tried to emulate the Narendra Modi formula of a larger-than-life leader. Her 'Jai Jai Rajasthan' campaign was a variation of 'Jeetega Gujarat'.

But the problem was that while Modi had a clean image, there were serious allegations of corruption against Raje and her government. Which means that a personality cult works only if the leader is seen as clean and above board. The 22 police firings during her reign also perpetuated the image of a maharani whose troops fire at the public. Then the caste arithmetic went badly wrong. The clean Congress leader and low-key former chief minister Ashok Gehlot was the gainer, though he is not a cult figure and the Congress did not do anything extraordinary. Most people believe the BJP defeated itself.

Gehlot explained his victory: "The voters have voted the BJP out of power and have voted against poor governance. There was all-round corruption and law and order was a big problem." According to him, Rahul and Sonia Gandhi's campaign in the state contributed in a big way to the Congress victory.

Still, this was a closely-fought election. The disarray and infighting in the BJP and RSS clearly went against Raje. Close to 60 rebel candidates were in the fray and she has told the BJP high command that she holds them responsible for sabotaging her prospects. A section of the RSS also worked against the CM. Indeed, there was a campaign from Raje's detractors to stop her from even becoming the leader of the Opposition in the assembly after her defeat.

Among the two national leaders who worked against Raje from within the BJP were Bhairon Singh Shekhawat and

	PARTY	2008	2003
	INC	96	56
	BJP	78	120
	BSP	6	2
	Others	20	22
	TOTAL	200	200



NARENDRA BISHT

Vasundhararaje on her way to the Raj Bhawan after the defeat

Jaswant Singh. The lady is supposed to be livid with all the men in the party who 'sabotaged' her. She will, however, be leader of the Opposition, say BJP sources, and will continue to play a long political innings in the state. Many in the party hope that once out of power, Raje will let her royal status impinge less on her politics, and become more accessible to partymen as well as the people of Rajasthan. ■

Saba Naqvi

CHHATTISGARH

WHY BJP WON: Like in Madhya Pradesh, the BJP led by Raman Singh successfully tided over anti-incumbency in Chhattisgarh by fielding as many 46 new candidates. What also returned Singh to power was his clean image, good governance and the subsidised rice and kerosene scheme which made his government popular in the tribal belt and among the poor.

WHY CONGRESS LOST: A divided Congress dug its own grave. Ajit Jogi, who was expected to propel the Congress

to power, had a running feud with other senior party leaders—AICC treasurer Motilal Vora, state unit president Dhanendra Sahu and veteran party V.C. Shukla, back in the party after some luckless grazing around. Result: a campaign that saw bickering and backstabbing from ticket distribution onwards. The Congress ran itself out of the race.

VICTOR-SPEAK: "The victory was the

	PARTY	2008	2003
	BJP	50	50
	INC	38	37
	Others	2	3
	TOTAL	90	90



people's approval of the BJP government's schemes and development plans. My main priority will be to maintain the flow of development and ensure peace."

—Raman Singh, Chhattisgarh's new CM.
K.S. Shaini in Bhopal



9 is Not 11 (And November isn't September)

by Arundhati Roy

WE'VE forfeited the rights to our own tragedies. As the carnage in Mumbai raged on, day after horrible day, our 24-hour news channels informed us that we were watching "India's 9/11". And like actors in a Bollywood rip-off of an old Hollywood film, we're expected to play our parts and say our lines, even though we know it's all been said and done before.

As tension in the region builds, US Senator John McCain has warned Pakistan that if it didn't act fast to arrest the 'Bad Guys' he had personal information that India would launch air strikes on 'terrorist camps' in Pakistan and that Washington could do nothing because Mumbai was India's 9/11.

But November isn't September, 2008 isn't 2001, Pakistan isn't Afghanistan and India isn't America. So perhaps we should reclaim our tragedy and pick through the debris with our own brains and our own broken hearts so that we can arrive at our own conclusions.

It's odd how in the last week of November thousands of people in Kashmir supervised by thousands of Indian troops lined up to cast their vote, while the richest quarters of India's richest city ended up looking like war-torn Kupwara—one of Kashmir's most ravaged districts.

The Mumbai attacks are only the most recent of a spate of terrorist attacks on Indian towns and cities this year. Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Delhi, Guwahati, Jaipur and Malegaon have all seen serial bomb blasts in which hundreds of ordinary people have been killed and wounded. If the police are right about the people they have arrested as suspects, both Hindu and Muslim, all Indian nationals, it obviously means something's going very badly wrong in this country.

If you were watching television you may not have heard that ordinary people too died in Mumbai. They were mowed down in a busy railway station and a public hospital. The terrorists did not distinguish between poor and rich. They killed both with equal cold-bloodedness. The Indian media, however, was transfixed by the rising tide of horror that breached the glittering barricades of India Shining and spread its stench in the marbled lobbies and crystal ballrooms of two incredibly luxurious hotels and a small Jewish centre. We're told one of these hotels is an icon of the city of Mumbai. That's absolutely true. It's an icon of the easy, obscene injustice that ordinary Indians endure every day. On a day when the newspapers were full of moving obituaries by beautiful people about the hotel rooms they had stayed in, the gourmet restaurants they loved (ironically, one was called Kandahar), and the staff who served them, a small box on the top left-hand corner in the inner pages of a national newspaper (sponsored by a pizza company I think) said 'Hungry, kya?' (Hungry eh?). It then, with the best of intentions I'm sure, informed its readers that on the international hunger index, India ranked below Sudan and Somalia. But of course this isn't *that* war. That one's still being fought in the Dalit bastis of our



The TRP unworthy The deaths at Bombay's true icon, VT, didn't matter to TV; those at Taj did

villages, on the banks of the Narmada and the Koel Karo rivers; in the rubber estate in Chengara; in the villages of Nandigram, Singur, Lalgarh in West Bengal; in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa; and the slums and shantytowns of our gigantic cities. That war isn't on TV. Yet. So maybe, like everyone else, we should deal with the one that is.

There is a fierce, unforgiving fault line that runs through the contemporary discourse on terrorism. On one side (let's call it Side A) are those who see terrorism, especially 'Islamist' terrorism, as a hateful, insane scourge that spins on its own axis, in its own orbit and has nothing to do with the world around it, nothing to do with history, geography or economics. Therefore, Side A says, to try and place it in a political context, or even try to understand it, amounts to justifying it and is a crime in itself. Side B believes that though nothing can ever excuse or justify terrorism, it exists in a *particular* time, place and political context, and to refuse to see that will only aggravate the problem and put more and more people in harm's way. Which is a crime in itself.

The sayings of Hafiz Saeed, who founded the Lashkar-e-Toiba (Army of the Pure) in 1990 and who belongs to the hardline Salafi tradition of Islam, certainly bolster the case of Side A. Hafiz Saeed approves of suicide bombing, hates Jews, Shias and Democracy, and believes that jihad should be waged until Islam, *his* Islam, rules the world.

Among the things he has said are:

"There cannot be any peace while India remains intact. Cut them, cut them so much that they kneel before you and ask for mercy."

And, "India has shown us this path. We would like to give India a tit-for-tat response and reciprocate in the same way by killing the Hindus, just like it is killing the Muslims in Kashmir."

But where would Side A accommodate the sayings of Babu Bajrangji of Ahmedabad, India, who sees himself as a democrat, not a terrorist? He was one of the major lynchpins of the 2002 Gujarat genocide and has said (on camera):

"We didn't spare a single Muslim shop, we set everything on fire...we hacked, burned, set on fire...we believe in setting them on fire because these bastards don't want to be cremated, they're afraid of it.... I have just one last wish...let me be sentenced to death.... I don't care if I'm hanged...just give me two days before my hanging and I will go and have a field day in Juhapura where seven or eight lakhs of these people stay... I will finish them off...let a few more of them die...at least twenty-five thousand to fifty thousand should die."

And where, in Side A's scheme of things, would we place the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh bible, *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* by M.S. Golwalkar 'Guruji', who became head of the RSS in 1944. It says:

"We die every day," the attacker India TV spoke to said. He didn't seem to want to change the world, just take it down with him.

"Ever since that evil day, when Moslems first landed in Hindustan, right up to the present moment, the Hindu Nation has been gallantly fighting on to take on these despoilers. The Race Spirit has been awakening."

Or:

"To keep up the purity of its race and culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races—the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here...a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by."

Of course, Muslims are not the only people in the gun sights of the Hindu Right. Dalits have been consistently targeted. Recently in Kandhamal in Orissa, Christians were the target of two-and-a-half months of violence which left more than 40 dead. Forty thousand people have been driven from their homes, half of whom now live in refugee camps.

All these years, Hafiz Saeed has lived the life of a respectable man in Lahore as the head of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa, which many believe is a front organisation for the Lashkar-e-Toiba. He continued to recruit young boys for his own bigoted jihad with his twisted, fiery sermons. On December 11, the UN imposed sanctions on the Jamaat-ud-Dawa and the Pakistani government succumbed to international pressure, putting Hafiz Saeed under house arrest. Babu Bajrangji, however, is out on bail and continues to live the life of a respectable man in Gujarat. A couple of years after the genocide, he left the VHP to join the Shiv Sena. Narendra Modi, Bajrangji's former mentor, is still the chief minister of Gujarat. So the man who presided over the Gujarat genocide was re-elected twice, and is deeply respected by India's biggest corporate houses, Reliance and Tata. Suhel Seth, a TV impresario and corporate spokesperson, has recently said, "Modi is God." The policemen who supervised and sometimes even assisted the rampaging Hindu mobs in Gujarat have been rewarded and promoted. The RSS has 45,000 branches, its own range of charities and seven million volunteers preaching its doctrine of hate across India. They include Narendra Modi, but also former prime minister A.B. Vajpayee, current Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani, and a host of other senior politicians, bureaucrats and police and intelligence officers.

And if that's not enough to complicate our picture of secular democracy, we should place on record that there are plenty of Muslim organisations within India preaching their own narrow bigotry.

So, on balance, if I had to choose between Side A and Side B, I'd pick Side B. We need context. Always.

In this nuclear subcontinent, that context is Partition. The Radcliffe Line which separated India and Pakistan and tore

through states, districts, villages, fields, communities, water systems, homes and families, was drawn virtually overnight. It was Britain's final, parting kick to us. Partition triggered the massacre of more than a million people and the largest migration of a human population in contemporary history. Eight million people—Hindus fleeing the new Pakistan, Muslims fleeing the new *kind* of India—left their homes with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Each of those people carries and passes down a story of unimaginable pain, hate, horror, but yearning too. That wound, those torn but still unsevered muscles, that blood and those splintered bones still lock us together in a close embrace of hatred, terrifying familiarity but also love. It has left Kashmir trapped in a nightmare from which it can't seem to

emerge, a nightmare that has claimed more than 60,000 lives. Pakistan, the Land of the Pure, became an Islamic republic, and then, very quickly a corrupt, violent military state, openly intolerant of other faiths. India on the other hand declared herself an inclusive, secular democracy. It was a magnificent undertaking, but Babu Bajrangji's predecessors had been hard at work since the 1920s, dripping poison into India's bloodstream, undermining that idea of India even before it was born. By 1990, they were ready to make a bid for power.

In 1992, Hindu mobs exhorted by L.K. Advani stormed the Babri Masjid and demolished it. By 1998, the BJP was in power at the Centre. The US War on Terror put the wind in their sails. It allowed them to do exactly as they pleased, even to commit genocide and then present their fascism as a legitimate form of chaotic democracy. This happened at a time when India had opened its huge market to international finance, and it was in the interests of international corporations and the media houses they owned to project it as a country that could do no wrong. That gave Hindu Nationalists all the impetus and the impunity they needed. This, then, is the larger historical context of terrorism in the subcontinent, and of the Mumbai attacks.

It shouldn't surprise us that Hafiz Saeed of the Lashkar-e-Toiba is from Shimla (India) and L.K. Advani of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is from Sindh (Pakistan).

In much the same way as it did after the 2001 Parliament attack, the 2002 burning of the Sabarmati Express and the 2006 bombing of the Samjhauta Express, the Government of India announced that it has 'incontrovertible' evidence that the Lashkar-e-Toiba backed by Pakistan's ISI was behind the Mumbai strikes. The Lashkar has denied involvement, but remains the prime accused. According to the police and intelligence agencies, the Lashkar operates in India through an organisation called the 'Indian Mujahideen'. Two Indian nationals—Sheikh Mukhtar Ahmed, a Special Police Officer



Afghan revenge America's debris, our headache

working for the Jammu and Kashmir Police, and Tausif Rehman, a resident of Calcutta in West Bengal—have been arrested in connection with the Mumbai attacks. So already the neat accusation against Pakistan is getting a little messy. Almost always, when these stories unspool, they reveal a complicated global network of foot-soldiers, trainers, recruiters, middlemen and undercover intelligence and counter-intelligence operatives, working not just on both sides of the India-Pakistan border, but in several countries simultaneously. In today's world, trying to pin down the provenance of a terrorist strike and isolate it within the borders of a single nation-state is very much like trying to pin down the provenance of corporate money. It's almost impossible.

In circumstances like these, air strikes to 'take out' terrorist camps may take out the camps, but certainly will not 'take out' the terrorists. And neither will war. (Also, in our bid for the moral high ground, let's try not to forget that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the LTTE of neighbouring Sri Lanka, one of the world's most deadly terrorist groups, were trained by the Indian army.)

Thanks largely to the part it was forced to play as America's ally, first in its war in support of the Afghan Islamists and then in its war against them, Pakistan, whose territory is reeling under these contradictions, is careening towards civil war. As recruiting agents for America's jihad against the Soviet Union, it was the job of the Pakistan army and the ISI to nurture and channel funds to Islamic fundamentalist organisations. Having wired up these Frankenstein's monsters and released them into the world, the US expected it could rein them in like pet mastiffs whenever it wanted to. Certainly it did not expect them to come calling in the heart of the Homeland on September 11. So once again, Afghanistan had to be violently remade. Now the debris of a re-ravaged Afghanistan has washed up on Pakistan's borders. Nobody, least of all the Pakistan government, denies that it is presiding over a country that is threatening to implode. The terrorist training

camps, the fire-breathing mullahs and the maniacs who believe that Islam will, or should, rule the world is mostly the detritus of two Afghan wars. Their ire rains down on the Pakistan government and Pakistani civilians as much, if not more, than it does on India. If at this point India decides to go to war, perhaps the descent of the whole region into chaos will be complete. The debris of a bankrupt, destroyed Pakistan will wash up on India's shores, endangering us as never before. If Pakistan collapses, we can look forward to having millions of 'non-state actors' with an arsenal of nuclear weapons at their disposal as neighbours. It's hard to understand why those who steer India's ship are so keen to replicate Pakistan's mistakes and call damnation upon this country by inviting the United States to further meddle clumsily

and dangerously in our extremely complicated affairs. A superpower never has allies. It only has agents.

On the plus side, the advantage of going to war is that it's the best way for India to avoid facing up to the serious trouble building on our home front.

The Mumbai attacks were broadcast live (and exclusive!) on all or most of our 67 24-hour news channels and god knows how many international ones.

TV anchors in their studios and journalists at 'ground zero' kept up an endless stream of excited commentary. Over three days and three nights, we watched in disbelief as a small group of very young men armed with guns and gadgets exposed the powerlessness of the police, the elite National Security Guard and the marine commandos of this supposedly mighty, nuclear-powered nation. While they did this, they indiscriminately massacred unarmed people, in railway stations, hospitals and luxury hotels, unmindful of their class, caste, religion or nationality. Part of the helplessness of the security forces had to do with having to worry about hostages. In other situations, in Kashmir for example, their tactics are not so sensitive. Whole buildings are blown up. Human shields are used. (The US and Israeli armies don't hesitate to send cruise missiles into buildings

6
Trying to pin down the provenance of a terror strike is like trying to pin down the provenance of corporate money. Almost impossible.





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and drop daisy cutters on wedding parties in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan.) But this was different. And it was on TV.

The boy-terrorists' nonchalant willingness to kill—and be killed—mesmerised their international audience. They delivered something different from the usual diet of suicide bombings and missile attacks that people have grown inured to on the news. Here was something new. *Die Hard* 25. The gruesome performance went on and on. TV ratings soared. Ask any television magnate or corporate advertiser who measures broadcast time in seconds, not minutes, what that's worth.

Eventually the killers died and died hard, all but one. (Perhaps, in the chaos, some escaped. We may never know.) Throughout the stand-off, the terrorists made no demands and expressed no desire to negotiate. Their purpose was to kill people and inflict as much damage as they could before they were killed themselves. They left us completely bewildered. When we say 'Nothing can justify terrorism', what most of us mean is that nothing can justify the taking of human life. We say this because we respect life, because we think it's precious. So what are we to make of those who care nothing for life, not even their own? The truth is that we have no idea what to make of them, because we can sense that even before they've died, they've journeyed to another world where we cannot reach them.

One TV channel (India TV) broadcast a phone conversation with one of the attackers, who called himself 'Imran Babar'. I cannot vouch for the veracity of the conversation, but the things he talked about were the things contained in the 'terror e-mails' that were sent out before several other bomb attacks in India. Things we don't want to talk about any more: the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, the genocidal slaughter of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, the brutal repression in Kashmir. "You're surrounded," the anchor told him. "You are definitely going to die. Why don't you surrender?" "We die every day," he replied in a strange, mechanical way. "It's better to live one day as a lion and then die this way." He didn't seem to want to change the world. He just seemed to want to take it down with him.

If the men were indeed members of the Lashkar-e-Toiba, why didn't it matter to them that a large number of their victims were Muslim, or that their action was likely to result in a severe backlash against the Muslim community in India whose rights they claim to be fighting for? Terrorism is a heartless ideology, and like most ideologies that have their eye on the Big Picture, individuals don't figure in its calculations except as collateral damage. It has always been a part of—and often even the aim of—terrorist strategy to exacerbate a bad situation in order to expose hidden fault lines. The

blood of 'martyrs' irrigates terrorism. Hindu terrorists need dead Hindus, Communist terrorists need dead proletarians, Islamist terrorists need dead Muslims. The dead become the demonstration, the proof of victimhood, which is central to the project. A single act of terrorism is not in itself meant to achieve military victory; at best it is meant to be a catalyst that triggers something else, something much larger than itself, a tectonic shift, a realignment. The act itself is theatre, spectacle and symbolism, and today, the stage on which it pirouettes and performs its acts of bestiality is Live TV. Even as the Mumbai terrorists were being condemned by TV anchors, the effectiveness of their action was magnified a thousand-fold by TV broadcasts.

Through the endless hours of analysis and the endless op-ed essays, in India at least there has been very little mention of the elephants in the room: Kashmir, Gujarat and the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Instead, we had retired diplomats and strategic experts debate the pros and cons of a war against Pakistan. We had the rich threatening not to pay their taxes unless their security was guaranteed (is it alright for the poor to remain unprotected?). We had people suggest that the government step down and each state in India be handed over to a separate corporation. We had the death of former prime minister V.P. Singh, the hero of Dalits and lower castes and villain of upper-caste Hindus, pass without a mention. We had



Gujarat '02 The elephant in the room

Suketu Mehta, author of *Maximum City* and co-writer of the Bollywood film *Mission Kashmir*, give us his version of George Bush's famous 'Why They Hate Us' speech. His analysis of why "religious bigots, both Hindu and Muslim," hate Mumbai: "Perhaps because Mumbai stands for lucre, profane dreams and an indiscriminate openness." His prescription: "The best answer to the terrorists is to dream bigger, make even more money, and visit Mumbai more than ever." Didn't George Bush ask Americans to go out and shop after 9/11? Ah yes. 9/11, the day we can't seem to get away from.

Though one chapter of horror in Mumbai has ended, another might have just begun. Day after day, a powerful, vociferous section of the Indian elite, goaded by marauding TV anchors who make Fox News look almost radical and left-wing, have taken to mindlessly attacking politicians, all politicians, glorifying the police and the army, and virtually asking for a police state. It isn't surprising that those who have grown plump on the pickings of democracy (such as it is) should now be calling for a police state. The era of 'pickings' is long gone. We're now in the era of Grabbing by Force, and democracy has a terrible habit of getting in the way.

Dangerous, stupid television flash cards like the Police are Good, Politicians are Bad/ Chief Executives are Good, Chief Ministers are Bad/ Army is Good, Government is

Bad/ India is Good, Pakistan is Bad are being bandied about by TV channels that have already whipped their viewers into a state of almost uncontrollable hysteria.

Tragically, this regression into intellectual infancy comes at a time when people in India were beginning to see that the business of terrorism is a hall of mirrors in which victims and perpetrators sometimes exchange roles. It's an understanding that the people of Kashmir, given their dreadful experiences of the last 20 years, have honed to an exquisite art. On the mainland we're still learning. (If Kashmir won't willingly integrate into India, it's beginning to look as though India will integrate/disintegrate into Kashmir.)

It was after the 2001 Parliament attack that the first serious questions began to be raised. A campaign by a group of lawyers and activists exposed how innocent people had been framed by the police and the press, how evidence was fabricated, how witnesses lied, how due process had been criminally violated at every stage of the investigation. Eventually the courts acquitted two out of the four accused, including S.A.R. Geelani, the man whom the police claimed was the mastermind of the operation. A third, Shaikat Guru, was acquitted of all the charges brought against him but was then convicted for a fresh, comparatively minor offence. The Supreme Court upheld the death sentence of another of the accused, Mohammad Afzal. In its judgement, the court acknowledged that there was no proof that Mohammad Afzal belonged to any terrorist group, but went on to say, quite shockingly, "The collective conscience of the society will only be satisfied if capital punishment is awarded to the offender." Even today we don't really know who the terrorists that attacked Indian Parliament were and who they worked for.

More recently, on September 19 this year, we had the controversial 'encounter' at Batla House in Jamia Nagar, Delhi, where the Special Cell of the Delhi police gunned down two Muslim students in their rented flat under seriously questionable circumstances, claiming that they were res-

ponsible for serial bombings in Delhi, Jaipur and Ahmedabad in 2008. An Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mohan Chand Sharma, who played a key role in the Parliament attack investigation, lost his life as well. He was one of India's many 'encounter specialists', known and rewarded for having summarily executed several 'terrorists'. There was an outcry against the Special Cell from a spectrum of people, ranging from eyewitnesses in the local community to senior Congress Party leaders, students, journalists, lawyers, academics and activists, all of whom demanded a judicial inquiry into the incident. In response, the BJP and L.K. Advani lauded Mohan Chand Sharma as a 'Braveheart' and launched a concerted campaign in which they targeted those who had dared to question the integrity of the police, saying it was 'suicidal' and calling them 'anti-national'. Of course, there has been no inquiry.

Only days after the Batla House event, another story about 'terrorists' surfaced in the news. In a report submitted to the court, the CBI said that a team from Delhi's Special Cell (the same team that led the Batla House encounter, including Mohan Chand Sharma) had abducted two innocent men, Irshad Ali and Moarif Qamar, in December 2005, planted 2 kg of RDX and two pistols on them, and then arrested them as 'terrorists'.

who belonged to Al Badr (which operates out of Kashmir). Ali and Qamar, who have spent years in jail, are only two examples out of hundreds of Muslims who have been similarly jailed, tortured and even killed on false charges.

This pattern changed in October 2008 when Maharashtra's Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), which was investigating the September 2008 Malegaon blasts, arrested a Hindu preacher, Sadhvi Pragya; a self-styled godman, Swami Dayanand Pande; and Lt Col Prasad Purohit, a serving officer of the Indian army. All the arrested belong to Hindu Nationalist organisations, including a Hindu supremacist group called Abhinav Bharat. The Shiv Sena, the BJP and the RSS condemned the Maharashtra ATS, and vilified its

Why is India inviting the United States to meddle clumsily in our complicated affairs? A superpower never has allies, only agents.

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chief, Hemant Karkare, claiming he was part of a political conspiracy and declaring that "Hindus could not be terrorists". L.K. Advani changed his mind about his policy on the police and made rabble-rousing speeches to huge gatherings, in which he denounced the ATS for daring to cast aspersions on holy men and women.

On November 25, newspapers reported that the ATS was investigating the high-profile VHP chief Praveen Togadia's possible role in the Malegaon blasts. The next day, in an extraordinary twist of fate, Hemant Karkare was killed in the Mumbai attacks. The chances are that the new chief, whoever he is, will find it hard to withstand the political pressure that is bound to be brought on him over the Malegaon investigation.

While the Sangh parivar does not seem to have come to a final decision over whether or not it is anti-national and suicidal to question the police, Arnab Goswami, anchorperson of Times Now television channel, has stepped up to the plate. He has taken to naming, demonising and openly heckling people who have dared to question the integrity of the police and armed forces. My name and the name of the well-known lawyer Prashant Bhushan have come up several times. At one point, while interviewing a former police officer, Arnab Goswami turned to the camera; "Arundhati Roy and Prashant Bhushan," he said, "I hope you are watching this. We think you are disgusting." For a TV anchor to do this in an atmosphere as charged and as frenzied as the one that prevails today amounts to incitement as well as threat, and would probably in different circumstances have cost a journalist his or her job.

So according to a man aspiring to be India's next prime minister, and another who is the public face of a mainstream TV channel, citizens have no right to raise questions about the police. This in a country with a shadowy history of suspicious terror attacks, murky investigations, and fake 'encounters'. This in a country that boasts of the highest number of custodial deaths in the world and yet refuses to ratify the International Covenant on Torture. A country where the ones who make it to torture chambers are the lucky ones because at least they've escaped being 'encountered' by our encounter specialists. A country where the line between the Underworld and the Encounter Specialists virtually does not exist.

How should those of us whose hearts have been sickened by the knowledge of all of this view the Mumbai attacks, and what are we to do about them? There are those who point out that US strategy has been successful inasmuch as the United States has not suffered a major attack on its home ground since 9/11. However, some would say that what America is suffering now is far worse. If the idea behind the 9/11 terror attacks was to goad America into showing its true col-

ours, what greater success could the terrorists have asked for? The US army is bogged down in two unwinnable wars, which have made the United States the most hated country in the world. Those wars have contributed greatly to the unravelling of the American economy and, who knows, perhaps eventually the American empire. (Could it be that battered, bombed Afghanistan, the graveyard of the Soviet Union, will be the undoing of this one too?) Hundreds of thousands of people, including thousands of American soldiers, have lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. The frequency of terrorist strikes on US allies/agents (including India) and US interests in the rest of the world has increased dramatically since 9/11. George Bush, the man who led the US response to 9/11, is a despised figure not just internationally but also by his own people. Who can possibly claim that the United States is winning the war on terror?

Homeland security has cost the US government billions of dollars. Few countries, certainly not India, can afford that sort of price tag. But even if we could, the fact is that this vast homeland of ours *cannot* be secured or policed in the way the United States has been. It's not that kind of homeland. We have a hostile nuclear weapons state that is slowly spinning out of control as a neighbour, we have a military occupation in Kashmir, and a shamefully persecuted, impoverished minority of more than a hundred and fifty million Muslims who are being targeted as a community and pushed to the wall, whose young see no justice on the horizon, and who, were they to totally lose hope and radicalise, end up as a threat not just to India, but to the whole world. If 10 men can hold off the NSG commandos and the police for three days, and if it takes half-a-mil-

lion soldiers to hold down the Kashmir Valley, do the math. What kind of Homeland Security can secure India?

Nor for that matter will any other quick fix. Anti-terrorism laws are not meant for terrorists; they're for people that governments don't like. That's why they have a conviction rate of less than two per cent. They're just a means of putting inconvenient people away without bail for a long time and eventually letting them go. Terrorists like those who attacked Mumbai are hardly likely to be deterred by the prospect of being refused bail or being sentenced to death. It's what they want.

What we're experiencing now is blowback, the cumulative result of decades of quick fixes and dirty deeds. The carpet's squelching under our feet.

The only way to contain (it would be naive to say end) terrorism is to look at the monster in the mirror. We're standing at a fork in the road. One sign says Justice', the other 'Civil War'. There's no third sign and there's no going back. Choose. ■



Forgotten man Former PM V.P. Singh's death passed without a mention

GETTY IMAGES

KAMAL NATH,
Commerce and
Industry Minister
Thanks to the
change of guard,
in a better
position to get
bailouts for
export-oriented
industries.

**RAGHURAM
RAJAN,** Economic
Advisor to PM
Handpicked to
guide the UPA
through the
crisis, his role
so far
remains
unclear.

K.M. CHANDRASEKHAR,
Cabinet Secretary
Key role in juggling demands of
ministries and diverse sectors
to chart a
course
correction.

**MANMOHAN
SINGH,**
PM-cum-FM
Best suited to
handle finance,
juggling
with too
much at
the
moment.

D. SUBBARAO, RBI Governor
Is painting a weak outlook
for '09, lower inflation could
lead to further cut in
interest rates.

**MONTEK SINGH
AHLUWALIA,**
Deputy Chair,
Planning
Commission
Played a key role
in formulating
stimulus
package, PM's
choice for
North Block.

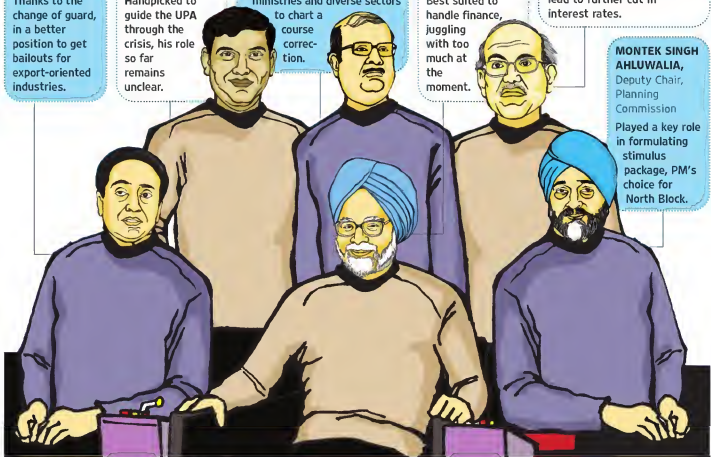


Illustration by SONGIT

The new economic team's revamp plan meets lukewarm response

A BAG OF DAMP SQUIBS

by **Lola Nayar** and **Pragya Singh**

INDIA'S new economic A-team has hit the ground running. But in an uncertain environment, will their spin work? The latest World Bank projections for global and India's growth has added to the sense of gloom, caging "animal spirits" or that sense of confidence crucial for economic growth. As RBI governor D. Subbarao affirms, the outlook remains bleak for 2009-10. Worryingly for the UPA—which still has

up to five crucial months in office—no one has answers to whether India has factored in the worst-case scenario.

This uncertainty partly explains the lukewarm response of economists and industry to the government's Rs 30,700-crore stimulus package, preceded by the RBI's move to bring down the cost of borrowing. While Rajiv Kumar of ICRIER calls it "a step in the right direction which could have been bolder", Jayati Ghosh of JNU bluntly dismisses it as "dipping your toe in water" without addressing the real issues. "Too little too late," is how Kerala finance minister Thomas Issac describes the financial package.

Why, even former finance minister P. Chidambaram is unhappy with the stimulus package, albeit for different reasons. According to sources in the Congress, Chidambaram conveyed to 10 Janpath that he did not favour the 4 per cent cut in CENVAT as "he was worried about the revenue loss with the fiscal deficit expected to rise sharply". Official sources admit the tax cut across sectors found a place after Chidambaram became home minister.

The key designers of the package are the PM-cum-FM; Planning Commission deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia, the PM's favoured candid-

**Bimal Jalan** | Former RBI governor

"This is a shifting, violent situation and nobody knows the depth of the crisis yet...this is the time to watch out and keep thinking on your feet."

**Prabhat Patnaik** | Economist

"Presumably the changes will not alter the decision-making process. That's because the suggestions of more than half the people have been ignored."

ate for the post of FM; RBI governor D. Subbarao. Commerce minister Kamal Nath is also playing a role in the new dispensation. Finally, cabinet secretary K.M. Chandrasekhar is tackling inputs from the committee of secretaries.

Though the PM has been in consultation with experts and think tanks, a feeling gaining ground is that not much of their input is being taken on board. Commenting on the "musical chairs", economist Prabhat Patnaik says, "Presumably the changes are not going to alter the decision-making process. That's because the suggestions of more than half the people have been ignored by the Centre."

IN matters of perception, the new team has moved quickly—and promised dexterity. But the lacklustre feedback makes it clear that

industry seeks more steps and further bailouts. As the policy response incrementally meets demand, the question being asked is whether India can afford to have an "ad-hoc approach" to the crisis. More importantly, will the PM, preoccupied as he is with national security issues and many portfolios, be able to do justice to the full-time job of managing a slowing economy?

Pressure is mounting on the PM to appoint a hands-on finance minister. His top candidates—Montek and former RBI governor C. Rangarajan—are being opposed within Congress circles. With general elections barely five months away, the party wants a political heavyweight. That is a tall order, as a serious contender would balk at the short tenure. While various names are doing the rounds—it's still unclear if we will have a stand-alone FM soon. For the moment, Parliament has been informed that Chidambaram will assist the PM to

steer the finance ministry.

This ad-hoc approach has not gone down well. Underlining the urgency, former RBI governor Bimal Jalan says, "This is a shifting, violent situation and nobody knows the depths of the crisis yet...this is the time to watch out and keep thinking on your feet." The situation on the ground indicates the finance ministry would need to be more proactive as it has had to step in once again to "persuade" wary banks to ease lending rates.

Moreover, policy planners acknowledge that more steps may be required to boost business confidence, create consumer demand to put the economy back on track and shore up dwindling foreign investments. Suresh D. Tendulkar, chairman of the economic advisory council to the PM, feels the next step will come once the banking sector and industry respond to the "psychological stimulus" announced. "We cannot let the fiscal situation go haywire. Industry will always find everything inadequate."

The measures will only have an impact after several weeks, if not months. Take infrastructure, now on the fast track. Though over a dozen projects in the roads sector have been approved by the cabinet, it would take at least a few months before the funds are tied up and project implementation can begin. "The stimulus package is not instant coffee. There's always gestation

time. The downturn will continue for some months till the money flow begins. The package, meanwhile, will help create expectation and infuse confidence," states Gajendra Haldea, advisor, Planning Commission.

For the time being, all efforts are on to ensure funding from agencies like the World Bank does not dry up due to improper implementation of projects. Haldea also says that if there is a demand, the government will provide more infrastructure stimulus packages.

More relief is also around the corner, particularly for labour-intensive sectors, promises commerce secretary Gopal K. Pillai. "A few more steps like direct relief to the housing sector through easier loans are in the pipeline. In the case of non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) which are still choked, a plan to ease ECB (external commercial borrowing) to help them recapitalise may be coming soon," says Pillai. Part of the package is already directed at easing the credit line to NBFCs and small and medium enterprises.

There are indeed grave issues that need to be tackled quickly. With the fiscal deficit expected to touch 10 per cent of GDP, the government lacks the funds to go in for a major infusion. Meanwhile, industry remains downbeat, as access to funds, including those from overseas, is not easy. Instead of aggressively pushing growth—particularly in the SME sector, which accounts for the bulk of India's manufacturing and exports—Yes Bank chief economist Subhadra Rao points out, "the policy focus has shifted to sector-specific needs since October".

The fear, of course, is further job losses if the economy slows down even more. Despite government efforts to rubbish such reports, they may well come true. That won't help matters in an election year. ■

with **Smita Gupta**

IN THE OFFING

- ▶ Government will wait for industry response to package, keep options open
- ▶ Pressure for full-time FM, political considerations may weigh on PM's choice
- ▶ Borrowing rules likely to be eased to help small industry and non-banking firms
- ▶ Job-loss concerns to spur packages for labour-intensive, export sectors
- ▶ Further lowering of bank credit rates, particularly for housing

BOUNDARIES CLOSING IN

Sports events, and big-budget cricket, cower under the backwash of terror, economic crisis

by Rohit Mahajan

BUSINESS is dwindling across the world, and in hard times, industry duly moves away from play, to focus on the core business. The Mumbai horrors have further dampened spirits, squeezing Indian sport as never before. The twin factors, economic downturn and terror, have led to the cancellation of

India's richest golf tournament, Indian Masters. Prize money in several tennis and football tournaments is down. Worse, cricket is likely to suffer most.

"Austerity is the mantra," says a senior Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket official gravely. "Where there was extravagance just six months ago, there will be prudence in IPL's second edition next year." But more immediately, the Champions League Twenty20 tournament, set to feature eight teams from five countries, was called off after the Mumbai attacks. The rebel Indian Cricket League (ICL), in its last leg, was also abandoned.

"The Champions League didn't have a sponsor—26/11 happened, and that probably saved them," says a representative of a sports management firm, unwilling to be named. "The fact is that until close of office hours on that day, the Champions League didn't have a title sponsor. The TV rights for the tournament were bought for \$975 million earlier this year—can you imagine! If the tournament can't even find a title sponsor, how will this sort of money be recouped?"

Nor does Year 2009 hold out hopes for the IPL. Its title sponsor is DLF, the big dad of the realty business which is in the throes of an economic tailspin. "What

will DLF do?" asks the representative. "Another big sponsor is Citibank, who're in trouble in the US. If such massive companies are facing a meltdown, will they have money to pump into sport?"

The meltdown came even as IPL team owners were taking stock, glumly accepting that their projections were wide of the mark. The CEO of one of the IPL teams would privately admit, months before the meltdown, that the picture painted to his franchise was rosier than it actually was, that the talk of break-even timelines and monetising opportunities didn't have a strong basis. The downturn has now forced several rethinks and mid-course corrections.

"The slowdown will impact everyone—the IPL, the franchises and all services related to them—in a very significant way," says a senior source in an IPL team. "We fear that local sponsorships streams, which include partners and gate money etc, will be disrupted. With money difficult to get by, we fear it'll

be a sort of an unequal battle, for most costs are either fixed or rising." Agrees Jeet Banerjee, MD of sports management firm Gameplan, "Corporates are under pressure, they will review their future participation in sports."

The fear is that measures to cut costs may not be adequate; the franchise fees are fixed, as are the players' costs. The depreciation of the rupee against the dollar—all IPL deals have been signed in dollars—have already increased cost by 25 per cent.

The tournament itself is in no danger, IPL team representatives insist, but the frills are likely to be shorn off. Says a Delhi team



PREY TO THE TIMES

- Champions League Twenty20, slated to be held in Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai, Dec 3 to 10, is off
- Indian Masters golf tournament, to be held in February, called off
- Last two India-England ODIs cancelled
- ICL's World Series tournament called off after 26/11, with a week's play to go



PTI

Gold to dust David Hussey heaves one out of sight during an IPL match

source, "Anything that's non-essential will not be done. The entertainment, the cheerleaders, the music videos will have to go." But wasn't "cricket-entertainment" or tamasha around the game the tournament's USP? "Yes, it was, but we have to think of surviving this slowdown," he answers.

Ironically, the smaller players in the field believe they won't be affected, that events with massive TV and in-stadia deals are likely to suffer most. Arindam Bhattacharya of Cradle Sports, a Delhi-based sports management company, is one of them. He believes that smaller events, outreach programmes of corporate houses which he's been doing, will not be affected

because at a low cost, the client can reach their target audience directly. "That's what my experience was when the last slowdown occurred, in 2000."

The big players, though, aren't dismayed. "We remain confident about the Champions League," insists R.C. Venkatesh, MD, ESPN Software India, which holds TV rights to the Champions League. "With an array of properties across sports categories, we will continue to grow." Dushyant Singh, a director at corporate consultancy KPMG, is also not overly worried. "The IPL is still in its nascent stages and it's yet to exploit innumerable revenue streams," he said. "I still expect the revenues of the IPL teams to rise and break even within the next two years."

KPMG has been in discussions with potential investors to find a buyer for the Hyderabad Deccan Chargers, owned by the Deccan Chronicle group. No deal has yet been reached, and observers say they may wait out the slowdown, hoping for more clement economic weather soon. That might be too sanguine a hope for the dark skies Indian sport finds itself under. ■

- Sponsorship and prize money in many football, tennis events fall, organisers say there are other factors too
- McLaren F1 team's event with Mika Hakkinen, to be held in Mumbai, cancelled
- World Doubles Squash Championship, to be held in Chennai from December 15-20, is cancelled

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by Smruti Koppikar and Payal Kapadia

TS two weeks after the terror strikes. Psychologist Husna Vanjara, husband Omar and their four-year-old daughter Alaiha are on a drive.

A line of fire engines, sirens blaring, slow the car down. Up ahead, they see the fire trucks head for a fourth-storey flat in a south Mumbai skyscraper that is ablaze. As the flames billow, sending plumes of smoke into the sky, Alaiha turns to her mother and asks, "Is it the Taj burning?"

Like scores of children in Mumbai, Alaiha watched the dramatic events of 26/11 unfold on television. The image of the Taj Mahal Hotel burning stayed with her. And that wasn't all—those nights, she woke up crying. Every time the doorbell rang, she feared 'bad men' would barge into their home. When she resumed school, she picked up the word 'terrorist' from school-bus conversations between older children.

Abhay Mehta, 6, watches his playmates in a swish south Mumbai apartment complex play 'terrorist-terrorist', now a favourite game. Lining up their friends against a wall, they go boom-boom with their toy guns, calling out the names of those who must "fall and die".

"When I told him on 27th morning that school was closed, his first question was: Was there a bomb blast? I nodded," says Sheetal Mehta, Abhay's mother and a former advertising professional. Like mothers, Sheetal struggles for appropriate answers—who is a terrorist, what do they want, can we shoot them and so on.

Post-26/11, the word 'terrorist' is part of a child's vocabulary. Worst affected, of course, have been the children rendered orphans. But no one, it seems, has escaped unscathed. The trauma has cut across class stratification, family status and background. Mumbai's youngest citizens are learning a harsh truth: they are not safe any more.

"Kids are scared even to let their parents go out for dinner," says child psychiatrist Pervin Dadachanji. "And it's a real fear: There were parents who went out for dinner and didn't come back."

One of Dadachanji's patients, a 17-year-old girl, wants to sleep next to her younger brother so she can feel safe. At a post-26/11 workshop for 10-12-year-old boys at Campion School, Dadachanji found safety was the prime concern.

School principals have chosen to take the issue head-on this time around, organising workshops, condemning the terror strikes, urging children to think in terms of peace and unity. Teachers were forewarned to nip all "terrorist as Muslim" talk instantly, but gently. "This time I noticed that the P-word, Pakistan, is all over. Children are beginning to hate the country and say so. This is the sentiment we have to deftly tackle," says the principal of a south Mumbai school.

At Hasanat High School, a suburban school with 60 per cent Muslim students, there's an outward calm but the undercurrents are palpable. "I was dreading the first few days," says principal Pramila Kudva, "but I addressed the issue in the school assembly when we resumed the Monday after the attack. Our chief trustee was caught in the Oberoi firing but managed to get out. We said a prayer for him, then for everybody. My mess-

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR CHILD

Talk to your kids openly about the event but leave out the gory details

Provide lots of time for questions; admit you cannot answer them all

Tailor your info to be age-specific

Don't be repetitive.

Limit media exposure. Chaperone them while they watch TV news.

Don't accuse them of heartlessness if they make light of the situation. It might be their method of coping.

Regressive or rebellious behaviour may be a distress signal. Address it. If it lingers, seek expert advice.

Give your children a sense of calm. Carve out 'family time'. Allow them to sleep with parents if they need.

Re-establish routine as soon as possible—including behaviour norms


Don't convey your prejudices to your kids. Terrorism is not about religion.

Help children identify good such as heroism and help rendered by scores.



Little M

Our children are waking



Who are terrorists?
Children watch a
condolence meeting
from their school-bus
in Mumbai

INDS, big QUERIES

ng up to a new terror-stained reality. And they're asking questions.



Fire! The fight is on at a video parlour

age; you are safe here. Then, I discourage Muslim and anti-Muslim talk."

Some ngo volunteers working with slum children have attempted to address their trauma. Personal safety is not bracketed as a very salient category among slum children, as you would expect, but their sense of insecurity is higher than before, says a volunteer who spent last week largely answering questions in a Mankhurd slum.

Children cope with trauma in different ways depending on their age and temperaments, says developmental paediatrician Vibha Krishnamurthy. Children below six typically resort to regressive behaviour—bed-wetting, thumb-sucking and tantrums. Drawing can be cathartic. Recently, five-year-olds were asked to draw their impressions at Hasanat, as in other schools, and many came up with drawings of themselves with parents struck off or removed from the scene, a helicopter hovering atop a building, commando-like figures near a dome-shaped building, and plenty of guns.

Older children, according to Vibha, might show social withdrawal, or increased rebelliousness, eventually even a fall in academic performance. Extroverted children typically cope by immersing themselves in an activity, or confiding in friends; introverted children might grow more reticent.

Vibha has been counselling children who lost parents in the attacks. First, they grapple with guilt. "Was it because

I didn't finish my homework?" asks one pre-schooler. "Was it because Mummy was fed up with me that she went out to dinner?" asks another. The other hurdle is to understand death, and grapple with the fear that losing parents might mean their lives change forever. "Can my friend still come over for a play-date?" ventures one child. "Can I still go to the same school?" inquires another.

"First, I explain dying means your body stops working, the way a television set or a toy stops working," says Vibha. "Then I explain that this is not your fault, your mummy was a good person and so are you. Acknowledge that you don't know why such a bad thing happened to good people, and reassure the child that s/he will be looked after. Re-establish routine as soon as possible, keeping mealtimes, even expectations for behaviour the same."

For young adolescents, the emotional



LIKE ALAIHA, SCORES OF kids are grappling with the fear of 'bad men'. Children's talk is rife with violence.

concerns are paired with queries—who were these terrorists and why did they do this? Rosina Mehra, mother of three, cautioned her older two sons, 13 and nine, against believing everything they are told. "I told my children that the terrorists were young people in difficult circumstances who were looking for direction and fell prey to this," says Mehra.

Sheetal too has been trying to tell Abhay: "don't hate the terrorists" because she wants him to grow up to understand and dialogue with people rather than hurt them. She adds: "The unthinking diet of violence that children feed on is scary. It makes them accept any violence that much easier. Abhay is not allowed to watch shows like *Power Rangers*, *Benten* or *ShinChan*."

Muslim homes have had to deal with more questions and greater insecurity. Zeenat Jaffer, a teacher of economics and Islamic studies took pains to tell her daughter, Rhea, 12—and her classmates—that the terrorists had little to do with Islam. Rhea has settled on the Fatimid civilisation, Muslim rulers of Egypt in the 10th and 11th centuries, for her project on world civilisations. It could help convey to her class "what Islam is really all about," says Zeenat.

Nagma Kazi has been telling her teenage children and others in their middle-class Muslim neighbourhood to "see the terrorists simply as terrorists, bad people". Nagma encouraged them to participate in demonstrations and peace marches. Every gesture helps, she says.

Dadachanji warned teachers at J.B. Petit School against giving communal colour to the terror attacks. "I told them to tell children that this is not about religion or India and Pakistan."

Once the fear has died down and the memory dulled, there will be no greater calling than to teach tolerance to Mumbai's youngsters. "I am asking Abhay to consider a friend's point of view, rather than smash it. I am teaching him to apologise more," says Sheetal.

"Tolerance needs to be taught at a basic level, whether it is for a child who is fatter than you or one who runs slower than you, or a child from another religion," says Vibha. "That is our best fight against terror." ■

by **Namrata Joshi** in Azamgarh and Jaunpur in UP

WE arrive at Madrasa Anwarul-Islam Salfia at 12.45 pm, a little before namaaz. As the students gather around the row of taps to wash their hands and feet and line up for prayers, this modest building in the dusty, narrow bylanes of Chauri in Jalalpur, in eastern UP's Jaunpur district, looks exactly how we expect a madrasa to be: a place for rigorous study of Islam, Urdu, Arabic.

What we encounter instead is a complete contradiction. The bare, red brick

walls of the Standard 7 classroom are yet to be plastered, the window frames still to be fitted. Here, 12-year-old Nadima Bano and Hishamuddin are reciting,

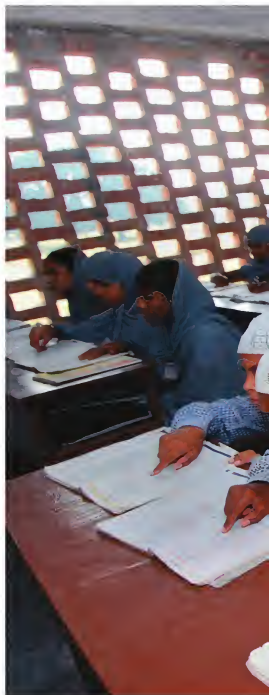
their pronunciation perfect and elocution chaste, this ode to India, "*Yasyo-ttarasyamdishibhati bhumao Himalayah parvatraj eshah...*" It's a sloka in Sanskrit that translated means 'the land shielded by the Himalayas in the north'. "*Sanskrit padhne se zubaan saaf ho jaati hai* (the diction becomes clear by learning Sanskrit)," Hishamuddin tells us. "Sanskrit is considered the mother of all languages," says their teacher Rabindra Kumar Mishra. "It's ironical that institutions like this madrasa should be nursing it

**"IT'S IRONICAL THAT
MADRASSAS should be
nursing Sanskrit when it's
vanishing elsewhere,"
says Salfia's R.K. Mishra.**

Of Sanskriti
Class 7 student
Hishamuddin reads out
from a Sanskrit text at
Jaunpur's Madrasa
Anwarul-Islam Salfia

Muslim children study Sanskrit and Hindu ones read Quran in these UP madrasahs

SLOKAS AFTER A NOON NAMAAZ



while it's vanishing elsewhere."

That it's no exception we have stumbled upon becomes clear to us as we proceed north to Ambedkarnagar district, to Madrasa Azizia Islamia in Kamharia village. The hands of the wall clock might be stuck at 6.45 in this primary school or maktab, but the school itself has progressed in other ways. Space is obviously at a premium—Classes 2-5 are being held simultaneously in separate, little rows in a large hall. Sirajuddin is teaching Sanskrit grammar to Class 3. "It

was my favourite subject when I was a child," he says with a smile. "*Balakah pathati; Sah pathati; Balakau pathatah* (A child studies, he studies, they study)..." his student Muhammad Shahid recites for us. They soon move on to another lesson. "*Asmakam deshasya asti ateev shobhanah* (our country is very beautiful)..."

However, this story is not only about Hishamuddins learning Sanskrit. It's also about 13-year-old Ravi Prakash Pandey, a Brahmin and the son of a Sanskrit professor, opting to learn Quran in Class

1. A former student of Azizia Islamia, he can now recite the holy text from memory and has a copy at home that he peruses religiously. "Quran teaches that we must help others and do good deeds and stay away from evil," he says, without batting an eyelid, and then rushes to wash himself and wear a cap before reading it aloud for us.

We hear this echo back in Salfia where two Hindu girls—14-year-old Arti Kumari and Anita Kumari—are writing about Prophet Mohammed in Urdu on the

Photographs by NARENDRA BISHT



blackboard—"Jab hamare Hazrat ki umr paintees baras ki thi (when our prophet was 35 years old)..." "They face absolutely no problem in writing, reading or understanding Urdu," their teacher Kaiser Jahan informs us.

At Madrasa Arbiya Zia-ul-uloom in Mandey in Azamgarh district, sisters Manju and Ranju Kumari have been learning Urdu from Class I. They mean it when they recite: "Urdu hai jiska naam hamari zubaan hai, duniya ki har zubaan se yaari zubaan hai (Urdu is the sweetest of the languages in the world)." Passing by Class I, you can hear Prashant Kumar explaining Urdu numerals to his classmates.

The teachers on either side of the linguistic divide find much in common between Sanskrit and Urdu—both languages, they say, have an evolved, complex grammar. "Their grammar must be the toughest," says Muhammad Tariq of Madrasa Arbiya. They see this coexistence of Sanskrit and Urdu as normal and not deliberately symbolic in these troubled, divisive times. "How can you associate a language with any religion?" asks Brijesh Kumar Yaduvanshi, a long-time resident of Jaunpur and president, All India University Students' Union. "Urdu doesn't belong to Muslims nor does Sanskrit have to do just with Hindus."

Nevertheless, the focus on Sanskrit, a language that has long gone out of everyday use, is intriguing. "It's not about helping students get jobs," says Qari Jalaluddin of Salfia, "but about teaching them humanity, about great thoughts and the right way to live, about being able to distinguish right from wrong." Sanskrit is taught at Salfia till Class 9, Urdu is compulsory in Class I-5, after which it's up to the Hindu students to decide whether they want to study it further.

This easy cohabitation of Sanskrit and Urdu in Jaunpur's madrasas could well be regarded as a legacy of the town's liberal Sufi past. "It was a centre of education in the middle ages," says Yaduvanshi, "has never witnessed a single Hindu-Muslim riot, and has always been

a symbol of unity." The Salfia madrasa has, in fact, been built on land bought from a Brahmin family in 1987.

The Azamgarh-Mau madrasas too offer a counterview for an area that has of late been made infamous for its alleged association with terrorist activities. "After all, it's the land of Rahul Sankritayan, Maulana Shibli, Firaq Gorakhpuri," says Sanjay Srivastava, professor at the Poorvanchal University. "It's a literary and cultural centre and people here have been feeling humiliated for being tar-



Well versed Ravi Prakash reciting Quran

geted for all the wrong reasons."

At a time when stereotypes about madrasas, especially those in eastern UP, as breeding grounds for terrorists have been gaining currency and every succeeding terror attack has boxed Indian Muslims further into neat categories as either educated, patriotic liberals or misinformed, misled fundamentalists, these madrasas are a powerful rejoinder, a heartening testimony to the unspoken, uncelebrated, broad-mindedness and inclusiveness of the common, faceless Muslim. The madrasas we visit have a sizeable number of Hindu students. Salfia currently has 475 students, of

whom about 225—almost 45 per cent—are Hindus. In Azizia Islamia, 35 of the 143 students are Hindus. The newly set up Madrasa Faizul Quran operates out of a small makeshift building in an obscure corner of Amari village in Azamgarh district. The maktab has 100 kids, of whom 20 are Hindus. At Arbiya, 22 of the 374 students are Hindus.

There is little to distinguish students. You know Vinky and Reena Yadav from Soni and Rehana Banu only by their names or in the way they wear their

head scarves. "We don't believe in bhed bhav," says Salfia's Jalaluddin. "Tameez and tehzeeb are the same in every religion." And though the madrasas do teach *hifz*, or memorisation of the Quran, all have a progressive vision too. "You can't move forward with religious education alone, our students need to be taught everything: science, geography, maths, English," says Salfia principal Muhammad Saikat. It is the only school in the vil-

lage which offers high school education for girls, or else they'd have to walk 10 km to the next school. The aim now is to start computers and electronics classes.

Like many others, these madrasas are yet to get government aid. There is no midday meal scheme, nor are students given free uniforms; it is all provided by the madrasa management boards. Azizia and Arbiya give students free books and charge no fee. In Salfia the fee's just Rs 5. Faizul Quran charges Rs 40 but only 10 per cent of the students pay up. The teachers themselves get no regular pay from the government but survive on the grants patrons give to the madrasas, the salary averaging from Rs 800-1,500. In contrast, teachers on the government payroll get a princely sum of Rs 3,000.

Humble and ill-equipped though they are, these madrasas are incredible examples of how Hindus and Muslims live as one than as separate entities in these forgotten hamlets. "They represent the Ganga-Jamuni sanskriti of our villages. Why would anyone want to break the sacred thread of this age-old relationship?" asks Srivastava. Why indeed? ■

"JAUNPUR HAS BEEN A LITERARY centre," says Prof Srivastava. "People here feel humiliated at being targeted wrongly."

A KINGLY AUREOLE

Faberge's exquisite Easter eggs breathe the splendour of tsars

by Shruti Ravindran

FOR the average rich Indian, who measures an object's luxuriousness by the number of Swarovskis studding its surface, and a living room's worth by how many porcelain baby Krishnas and mermaids they can crowd into it, the first-ever exhibition of priceless Faberge artifacts, currently on at the National Museum, should be an education in real opulence.

Over a century old, the 96 glittering confections on display include diamond-studded longnettes and opera glasses, gauzy gold evening bags, diamond-encrusted parasol handles fashioned out of semi-precious stones, and "trifles" like gem-encrusted, engraved gold cigarette cases and snuff boxes. These, along with the nine exquisite Imperial Easter Eggs, speak of the bygone refinements and luxuries of Tsarist Russia.

Easter, the most important festival in the Russian Orthodox faith, was the grandest ceremonial occasion in Tsarist Russia. There was an all-night state vigil, an exchange of a customary "triple kiss" between the Tsar and Tsarina and their subjects, and,

of course, the exchange of consecrated and painted Easter Eggs. The elite would exchange simple enamel eggs which concealed precious "knick-knacks"—ashtrays in semi-precious stones, or diamond-studded fancies from Faberge.

The most glorious and whimsical of these were the Imperial Easter Eggs, gifted annually by Tsar Alexander III and his son Nicholas II, to their wives—Empresses Maria Feodorovna and Alexandra Feodorovna. Between 1885 and 1916, 50 of these increasingly ornate eggs were made, each containing a circumstance-specific "surprise" designed to disarm and delight its recipient.

The showstopper is the much-celebrated Coronation Easter Egg, gifted to Empress Alexandra in 1897. It contains a miniature replica, in glittering gem-encrusted gold, of the sumptuous coach of Catherine the Great, which carried Alexandra to her coronation the previous year. The 1894 Renaissance Easter egg, the last gift from Tsar Alexander III to his beloved consort 'Minnie' before he died in her arms later that year, is a fabulous confection of translucent bluish agate, rose-cut diamonds, pearls and rubies. The intricately wrought Bay Tree Egg, a gift from Tsar Nicholas



Crown jewels The Coronation Egg, 1897, displays Catherine the Great's coach

II to his widowed mother in 1911, depicts a little singing bird of paradise with natural feathers, perched atop a tree with glittering leaves of Birbaum jade and sparkling fruits of amethyst and citrine.

Meanwhile, as the years on the display cases draw ominously near to 1917, it's hard not to suppress a shudder at the thought of the Tsarist regime brought to its knees by Lenin and his Bolsheviks. And in 1918, the last Tsar and his family—long ensconced in their cocoon of gracious cosmopolitan sophistication—were taken to the Urals, and shot dead.

Today, Faberge eggs symbolise a vanished way of life to nostalgists and historians; coveted class-prestige to Russian oligarchs; and, to everyone, the perfectionism and unparalleled craftsmanship of master jeweller Carl Faberge.

Due to their irreplaceable worth—they are valued at \$26 million—bringing them to India was a no less formidable feat. Intended as the grand finale to the Year of Indo-Russian Friendship, it took the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) nearly two years to pull off. "This was an ambitious goal," admits ICCR director-general Pavan K. Verma. "Due to its price, there were security concerns—that's why we're exhibiting in this gallery in the very secure National Museum. We also had to tie up the insurance, and arrange for the safe transport of these priceless objects from museums in London, St Petersburg, and Moscow."

(On till January 18 at the National Museum, New Delhi) ■



From paradise The Bay tree Egg, 1911

KOCHI TO KODAMB

Kollywood to Bollywood, there's a new lingo in the vanity vans. The

by **Pushpa Iyengar** in Chennai

THEY have had temples built in their honour, love letters written in blood. On Kollywood's film sets, the hero may be the next neta-in-waiting, but it's the heroine (aka "the love interest") who gets the box-office pulse all aflutter. And for a while now, there's been a new buzz going. Apparently Punjabi

season is out, the new wave has a distinct Kerala flavour to it. Yes, yesterday's dowdy ducklings have on the sly bloomed into swans. As one big-ticket producer put it, "Mallu girls are rocking!"

The accolades aren't surprising, considering the star turn by Malayali actresses like Asin and Nayanthara. Other stars like Meera Jasmine (2004 National Award winner for the Malayalam film, *Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam*), Kavya Madhavan, Navya Nair, Priya Mani, Bhavna (a hit in Telugu films) and Sneha also have Malayali roots and a growing market outside Kerala. Having honed their craft in Mollywood, they have been lured to Tamil

Nadu and Andhra Pradesh where the moolah is a lot more attractive and the audience base a whole lot bigger.

Meera Jasmine, for instance, gets Rs 10-15 lakh for a role in Malayalam cinema but rakes in Rs 40-50 lakh in Tamil and Telugu films. Asin (star of Aamir Khan's soon-to-be-released *Ghajini*) and Nayanthara are in the big league already, commanding between Rs 75 lakh to Rs 1 crore for a film.

What caused this late migration? Well, besides the pay and the fans, the truth is that since the late '90s, Malayalam has witnessed a startling drop in quality cinema

(one reason being the void created by the deaths in quick succession of auteurs like Aravindan, Padmarajan and Bharathan). Tamil cinema, meanwhile, was seeing a surge of new talent in scriptwriting and directing, making it a magnet for talented actresses.

The Malayali actress, though, is an unlikely candidate for the dominant-force-in-South-Indian-films title, more because they couldn't be further from the typical Bollywood heroine, known for her bikini-worthy bod. In fact, there was a time when Malayali actresses were caught between two boats—the sati-savitri or the *Her Nights* tramp, a figure further perpetuated by the Mollywood soft porn factory films of the '80s. (The latter enjoyed a brief revival in movies



Nayanthara, Vishal in *Sathyam* (Telugu)

Ready, steady, po Asin of *Ghajini*

AKAM

Mallu girls are here.

starring Telugu actress Shakeela in the mid-'90s but has since died out again.) Nowadays, there's an altogether different buzz about the Malayali heroine. Art critic Sadanand Menon says "there is a demand for acting and emoting capabilities, in addition to dancing skills, in South Indian cinema now". He adds, however, that historically it hasn't taken long for South Indian heroines making the crossover to Mumbai to get slotted into "the plastic image that Bollywood heroines have". He cites the case of Sridevi "who could even trump Kamalahaasan, but once she went to Bollywood became known as 'Thunder Thighs'."

But in Tamil and Telugu films too, acting talent alone isn't enough. Which is where Mallu girls are scoring again—they are now perceived to be more glamorous, something even Bollywood is waking up to. Asin, who has done just one Malayalam film, and Nayanthara, who has done 4-5, are already looking beyond South India and blithely embracing the world beyond. Asin is all set to take on the life of a Bollywood superstar after *Ghajini*; Nayanthara has emerged

as a no hang-ups hottie wearing a bikini in *Billa*, doing a sexy number with Vishal in *Sathyam*, even doing a lip-lock with Simmbu in *Vallavan*.

Says Nayanthara, who was quick to drop her village belle image after the crossover: "One has to be modern. In the glamour game, you can't have boundaries." Megha Nair, a lissome 20-year-old who debuted earlier this year opposite Satyraj in *Thangam*, takes it all in stride. "Mallu actresses today are cool and bold," she says. It's the same with "accidental actress" Padmapriya, an MBA who in an earlier avatar worked with General Electric: "For me, wearing a mini-skirt is as easy as wearing a sari. Sex sells whether you are size zero or size 10."

Padmapriya also points out that Malayali heroines find it easy to make an immediate impact in Tamil/Telugu cinema because "it's easy to adjust—there's a similar culture, similar thought process, similar language". Making the move to Bollywood, though, is not as simple. Megha agrees, "Things are different in Bollywood...the audience is different,

the films revolve around style. The stars have to be physically fit and in shape."

Yes, size still matters. While Kollywood heroes like Surya and Vishal are into six-pack abs, the audience here still prefers its heroines to be "gundu-gundu" or buxom. "When I even mention that I am going to lose weight, there is a chorus of disapproval," says Megha.

The "Mallu girls" are also not bound by the constraints imposed on local girls (a fact true for actresses from North India too). As a successful Tamil TV show producer says, "Outside heroines have always dominated here. We are still a conservative society which frowns on girls joining the industry. The Mallu brigade is the latest, they have taken over..."

Thiruvananthapuram-based film writer C.S. Venkateshwaran points out there was a time in Kerala too when girls were stigmatised for joining films. He recalls a period when Sharada, a "Telugu outsider", ruled Malayalam cinema. But girls from newly affluent families, with their Gulf money and upbringing, have shed these inhibitions. Attitudes in general have also changed since the '90s. Actresses like Asin, Nayanthara and Megha started as models. Their previous careers were not just stepping stones but also conditioned them into accepting that "exposing" comes with the territory.

Says Kerala-origin actress-turned-director Revathy, who's done a range of films across languages: "I have never thought in terms of regional labels. But

Kerala has a culture of state competitions for dance, music and theatre. This brings confidence and an easier entry into films. That's why you see more Malayali girls in films nowadays."

Kollywood actor-director R. Parthiban, one of Asin's co-stars in her debut Malayalam film *Narendran Makan Jayakanthan Vaka*, has the final word: "Bharatiyar (the Tamil poet) said Kerala girls were very beautiful. The writer Sujata too has commented on the same lines. We can't help it, we are a culture that respects our elders!" ■

"FOR ME, WEARING A MINI-skirt is as easy as wearing a sari. Sex sells whether you are size zero or size 10...."



Navya Nair, Darshan in *Gaja* (Kannada)



Meera Jasmine, Bharath in *Nepali* (Tamil)

Path of the Wheel

Nilekani culls from wide professional, social experiences to examine India, its polity and a hopeful road ahead



IMAGINING INDIA: Ideas for the New Century
by Nandan Nilekani

Penguin/Allen Lane | 520 pages | Rs 699

by Sanjaya Baru

THIS is not a billionaire's 'here's-the-secret-of-my-success' book—even though Nandan Nilekani couldn't resist putting his face on the cover. If you want to know how Nilekani, co-chairman, Infosys Technologies, became a successful entrepreneur (even if an 'accidental' one, as he puts it), don't buy this book. But if you want to know what one of our brightest and more successful business leaders thinks about our country, how it works, what makes it tick, and what can make it work better, read on.

This is an inspirational, optimistic book that makes you more hopeful about India. It rejects our *chalta-hai* nonchalance and celebrates the Infosysian *cando* spirit. But Nilekani regrets that "in our politics we are yet to tap into our new language of hope."

Where do the book's ideas come from? They reflect the aspirations and experiences of an urban middle-class professional, who went to a small-town English-medium school, made it to an IIT and benefited from the IT boom. His heroes are Rajiv Gandhi (the politician who understood computers), Sam Pitroda, N. Seshagiri, N. Vittal, Sudhir Kumar, Ravi Narain, C.B. Bhavé, N. Gopalaswamy, Rajeev Chawla and others who pioneered India's electronic revolution.

Nilekani's ideas often have their source

in his multitudinous interactions with academics, policymakers and persons in public life as a member of the Bangalore Agenda Task Force, National Knowledge Commission, Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission review committee, National Advisory Group on e-Governance and the IT Task Force for Power. He also draws on his civil society engagement with activists like Ramesh Ramanathan of Janaagraha.

Nilekani's IT background and his involvement in public policy and civil society activities shape this book. So the focus is on governance and bureaucracy, education and infrastructure, energy and environment, urbanisation and social security. Nilekani makes good intellectual use of his membership of these committees and generously acknowledges the influence of scholars like Andre Beteille and policymakers like Montek Ahluwalia and Vijay Kelkar on his thinking.

Nilekani is a great learner. Hence, he has been able to write a book that educates. The most stimulating chapters are the ones on urbanisation, education and infrastructure policy. It is a measure of India's progress this past decade, thanks to the IT revolution and the services economy boom, that few today would challenge his views on the importance of the English language. I recall the rebuke I received from Hindi fanatics (including Mulayam Singh Yadav) as recently as

This is an optimistic, less cynical book. Nilekani rejects our *chalta-hai* casualness, embraces the Infosysian *cando* spirit.



ATUL LOKE

1995 when, as editorial page editor of *The Times of India*, I wrote an editorial entitled 'English is an Indian Language'. Nilekani demonstrates why, and the economic and social importance of it.

Nilekani is a liberal and a renaissance man. He not only shares the values that define the Indian republic, he embodies them. He offers a convincing and balanced perspective on the future direction of public policy in India. He recognises the important role the government will have to play in areas like infrastructure, education, healthcare and law and order, and pleads for greater liberalisation in other areas where enterprise is still being held back. His economic agenda is a familiar one and is inspired by the policies unleashed by Manmohan Singh.

Surprisingly, one institution of governance that escapes his attention is the judiciary. Is it because Nilekani has never had a brush with the law, given Infosys's good corporate governance record, or because he wants to play safe? New ideas for the reform of our judiciary and legal process would be a key element of any agenda for the 21st century.

I have only two minor criticisms of the book. First, the title. Nilekani's publishers, and his intellectual companion in the making of this book, Ramachandra Guha, would surely have known that Ronald Inden wrote a highly acclaimed book two decades ago called *Imagining India*. So why repeat? Second, the indexing and referencing are patchy. To offer just one self-serving example, footnotes 35 and 36 on page 164 refer to an essay of mine on regional business and regional politics, but in the text Nilekani attributes the views to political scientist Atul Kohli. Ah, well. ■

Thhat's Pacific



THE BIKINI MURDERS

by Farrukh Dhondy

HarperCollins | 272 pages | Rs 395

by Raja Menon

WITH a sensuous cover portraying a luscious nude, presumably meant to be dead, but with a healthy glowing skin, a reader might assume that this is a book of murders inspired by perverted sex. Readers old enough to remember the twisted mind behind the killings by Charles Sobhraj will recognise the similarities between Johnson Thhat, the protagonist of this book, and Sobhraj. Dhondy clearly meant the similarities to be recognised, but does not allude to Sobhraj in any way—with good reason. The book meanders through the misdeeds of many latter-day villains like the Taliban, other sundry jihadis and Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, the British Pakistani, who led Daniel Pearl to his death. But why is Dhondy, a writer of fine prose and sensitive conversation in books like *Bombay Duck*, portraying Sobhraj and Sheikh in...a novel? The question must remain unanswered, because the author, despite many and scattered attempts through the book, does not really understand evil, nor seeks to write or portray it. Sobhraj in real life was certainly a pervers, a difficult characteristic to portray. It would have been a challenge worthy of Dhondy

For the amount of crime committed, there is a near-complete absence of menace. People get killed with a bland regularity.

the writer if he did write a book like Marquis de Sade's memoirs structured around Sobhraj. Eventually, it was the sheer number of murders, for very petty gain, that made Sobhraj famous, or rather notorious. That he had tremendous intellectual resources became clear only when he was jailed for twenty years and learnt languages and law while imprisoned.

For the amount of crime committed in this book, there is a near-complete absence of menace. There is none of the sickening fear or premeditation to hurt and kill that must reside in the mind of a serial killer. Victims are hit on the head, or most often poisoned, and they simply die, as if they were drinking coffee. But despite Dhondy's failure to create tension as the necessary accompaniment to crime, his fluid prose does surface now and then. He is at his best, as always, when writing about relationships. And when he shuts out all but the Thhat-Virginie relationship, the prose flows and grabs and pins the reader. It is immaterial that Thhat is actually being inconsistent with his inability to really love women, life and probably sex.

The leap from the Sobhraj years to the world of international jihadi terrorism is a good idea to retain the reader's interest, but again needs different skills akin to that of a Frederick Forsyth or a Len Deighton. They both do a huge amount of scenario and subject research, something Dhondy could have done well with, as he shifts the scene to Paris, London, Cambridge, Belgium and Pakistan with dizzying rapidity and unknown purpose.

The real Dhondy surfaces again in narrating the simple story of Thhat's daughter, Samarra Sands, only to have her killed by a thug hired by her father. The idea is to reinforce the concept of Thhat the Psycho, after an interlude of Thhat the domesticated man. Did Dhondy really need to write this book? Did HarperCollins advise him that books about serial killers and international terrorism probably needed a different set of skills? We might never know. ■

BIBLIOFILE

Hardluck Counter

THE Mumbai terror attack has bombed Penguin's grand plans for the launch of their biggest ever gamble: Nandan Nilekani's *Imagining India*. Everything was in place: a record 50,000 hardback copies printed (although they don't say so), a promo tour of six cities (the equivalent of a 21-gun salute in writers' circle), and with an author who is one of the best-known faces in India. And then the bombshell, just as he arrived in Bangalore for the launch on Nov 27. As they say—the best-laid plans of publishers can go awry.



A Plague On Patrick

TALK about "an extreme form of literary criticism", as V.S. Naipaul once described the fatwa on Salman Rushdie for his *The Satanic Verses*. On a recent visit to a witch doctor in Kampala, he wanted to put a curse on Patrick French, author of his official biography, *The World Is What It Is*. What the world took for his "act of self-lacerating honesty" turns out to be seething rage at his "two-timing" biographer.



Imported Explosion

THERE were no prizes for guessing who would win the new Shakti Bhatt award for First Book, although the judges tried to keep it a secret till the announcement. As one of the six contenders, Amruta Patil, shortlisted for her graphic novel, *Kari*, put it: "When a writer flies in from Pakistan for the award ceremony, you know who'll win." She was right: Mohammed Hanif walked away with the Rs 1 lakh prize money for his *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. Among the missing contenders for the prize—Aravind Adiga (*The White Tiger*), Pallavi Aiyer (*Smoke and Mirrors*), and Namita Devidayal (*The Music Room*).

Illustrations by SORIT

CULTURE CULTURE

Mouse



WHO Gadget

WHAT The first 'mouse'—a tracking device for computers—was made of wood with a long wire connecting it to the main terminal. Since the wire looked like a long tail, it was called a 'mouse'. This is proof that even computer scientists have a sense of humour.

WHY December 9 will mark the 40th anniversary of the day this humble gadget was introduced to the public. Despite laser pens, track balls and touch screens, the mouse has only gained more and more supporters, and the tech world is still trying to design a better mousetrap.

HOW TO

Be a Protester

These are the worst of times; and the best time for the smug and self-righteous to charge the streets and monuments with melting candles and angry slogans. Here's how to fit right in: air out your whitest clothes (think Nirma-ad white), and step out with a carefully calibrated expression of tearful rage (think *Rang de Basanti*). Make a big poster with an angry, sarcastic message—"Sack all politicians" is a classic. And don't forget your candle.



SONIT

MIND

A father and son were driving in a car when they met with a horrible accident. The father was declared dead and the son was rushed to the hospital, but at the hospital the surgeon refused to operate, saying the boy was the surgeon's son. How is this possible?



The surgeon was the boy's mother.

A N S W E R



TINKER BELL

RING OUT THE OLD, RING IN THE new'—Tennyson's words, so evocative of Christmas cheer, are bound to lift your spirits this season. And what better way to do this than to acquire Regalia's solid gold Christmas bell. With its twinkling tone that sounds like softly falling snow, this handcrafted 18-carat gold accessory that retails for Rs 1,80,000 is a bit too bulky to use as a tree ornament. Nevertheless, it's a good way to hark back to the ancient tradition of bell-ringing, a way of expressing goodwill in the holiday season. □

Nitya Rao

Doors That Opened

NOBODY HAS DEPICTED THE turbulent undercurrents that swirl beneath the placidly conventional facade of nineteenth century morality better than Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. Dark, disquieting portrayals of families in personal strife, his plays will be relevant as long as duplicity and pretence continue to grease the wheels of social interaction. This week-long Ibsen Festival features gifted directors—Ratan Thiyam, Un-Magritt Nordseth, Jon Tombre, Neelam Mansingh, Anuradha Kapoor and Juni Dahr—each of whom brings Ibsen alive in their individual way. Till Dec 18, www.norwayemb.org.in/culture □



BOMBAY RESTAURANT

Business as Usual

Leopold Cafe, Colaba Causeway,
Mumbai; Tel, 22828185
Meal for two: Rs 400

by Anvar Alikhan

 I ONCE HAD A visitor from France whom I needed to impress, so I invited him to the Oberoi. He looked unhappy. When I asked where he'd like to go instead, he said, "Leopold Cafe!" Indeed, "Leo's" is probably one of the few Indian brands that have acquired a cult following overseas, alongside

Old Monk rum, Kingfisher beer and Royal Enfield bikes.

It started life in 1871 as "Leopold & Co", a pharmacy run by a Swiss chemist. Since then it's been through avatars as a wine shop, general store and, ultimately, Irani cafe. Everyone who's read *Shantaram* knows Gregory Roberts was a regular here, but not many know



APOORVA SALKADE

that this was also one of Charles Sobhraj's haunts. (Ferhan Jehani, a member of the family that's run the place since 1923, can probably tell you some interesting stories!) Leo's serves things like akuri, Irani chello kebab, biryani, and fresh fruit



juice. But the real speciality of the house is its draught beer, served in special multi-level pitchers. The last time we went, we counted at least eleven different nationalities of diners. And as we left, people were loudly singing 'Happy Birthday' in Italian. We're happy to know that now, after the terror attack, its back to business as usual at Leo's. ▣

BANGALORE THEATRE

Play Steady

WATCH Pondicherry-based theatre troupe Adishakti's production of *The Hare and the Tortoise* at the Ranga Shankara. The performance company, engaged in the rejuvenation of ancient art forms, fuses music, mime and movement to produce a riveting contemporary form. Dec 19-21, Ranga Shankara



DELHI ART

Open Canvas

48C, INDIA'S FIRST PUBLIC CONTEMPORARY ART festival, promises to throw the spotlight on environmental issues like urban pollution and food crises through art exhibited in Delhi's public heritage spaces. On display will be sculptures, video and interactive installations by well-known artists like Subodh Gupta and Vivan Sundaram. Dec 12-21, www.48c.org



CHENNAI POETRY

Poet's Corner



SOME PUBLISHERS may see gloom and doom in low sales for poetry, but the Landmark Poetry Prakriti Festival is testimony to its good health. Besides readings with 25 emerging poets at places like parks and commercial establishments, this fortnight-long festival includes musical performances by Pakistani indie singers Zeb & Haniya. Dec 16-30, www.poetrywithprakriti.in



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QUESTIONS

Avika Gor



The lead artiste of the popular TV serial *Balika Vadhu* on her newfound stardom

1 How did *Balika Vadhu* come to you?
I'm eleven now. I've been acting in television serials since I was ten. Someone took my clipping and showed it to the *Balika Vadhu* people and they called me for an audition. That's how it happened.

2 Is your character difficult to play?
No. Even the language is close to my mother tongue Gujarati so I pick it up easily.

3 Are you like Anandi in real life?
Yes, I am exactly like Anandi, there's only one difference between the two of us. Anandi is married while I am not!

4 Who helps you with your acting?
Mum accompanies me to the sets but daddy teaches me how to deliver my dialogues and pronounce words correctly.

5 Who's your favourite character in *Balika Vadhu*?
I like them all because I learn from them. Sadia Siddique plays my teacher and I really learn from her. And from my own character Anandi from whom I learn to speak pitter-patter.

6 How does it feel to kill every other TV serial?
That isn't true. People do have other favourite serials, apart from mine.

7 Do you enjoy being a celebrity?
I just love it. I enjoy it so much that I don't get tired of it.

8 You've signed films too we hear?
Yes, *Pathshala* and *Morning Walk*. I have a very small role in both. *Pathshala* has Ayesha Takia and Shahid Kapur and Nana Patekar. It is made by Ahmad Khan. That shoot is over. *Morning Walk* is yet to start.

9 Apart from action, what else do you enjoy?
I love to dance. I've been training to be a dancer since the age of four.

10 What do you want to be when you grow up?

Of course, Miss Universe and I'll continue acting after that!

Lata Khubchandani



MAHARATHI boasts of a fine set of actors who deliver suitably efficient performances but still leave very little impact. Much the same holds true for the film. Shivam Nair's sophomore effort after *Ahista Ahista* might mark a major shift in terms of the subject—from middle-class romance to crime of passion—but the narration remains the same, slow, tempered and discreet. It's evident that Nair is a filmmaker with a decent, prudent approach and knows his craft well. However, for a thriller the film does not pack a punch. The lurking danger, ominous air and destructive passion; the jealousies and deceptions are all implicit yet don't leap out on the screen. The film does not quite take you to the edge of the seat and remains only intermittently engaging.

Naseer is a wastrel of a filmmaker with a femme fatale wife (Neha Dhupia) and a small-time crook (Parash Rawal) as a driver and trusted aide. One fine day he commits



Maharathi

Starring: Naseeruddin Shah, Parash Rawal, Neha Dhupia, Boman Irani
Directed by Shivam Nair



Dil Kabaddi

Starring: Irrfan, Soha Ali Khan, Konkana Sen, Rahul Bose, Saba Azad
Directed by Anil Senior

★★★★ Must See ★★★ Good ★★ Watchable ★ Avoidable

suicide by shooting himself and leaves behind a lot many crores worth of insurance money. Trouble is that this fortune can be claimed only if his suicide can be passed off for a murder. So his body is hidden in the deep freezer and plots and counter-plots and twists and turns unfold. The film is an adaptation of Parash Rawal's immensely successful, long-running play, India's equivalent of sorts to Agatha Christie's *Mousetrap*. The film, however, is unable to let go of the stagnation. Wish the static energy could have been harnessed into something dynamic. ■



HERE'S another film with a who's who cast that begins amusingly but ends with a whimper. Borrowing the template of Woody Allen's *Husbands and Wives*, it trains the camera on dysfunctional urban relationships. These are marriages where romance and togetherness have been replaced by boredom and cat fights. Is infidelity the answer and cure-all? All in all, you get some funny lines but no answers. There's an impressive Lolita-like newcomer, Saba Azad. Largely confusion prevails but eventually, matters come back a full circle. ■ —Namrata Joshi

HIGH FIVES

BOLLYWOOD	HOLLYWOOD	POP SINGLES
1 Dostana	Four Christmases	Decode (Paramore)
2 Dil Kabaddi	Twilight	Three Little Birds (Connie Talbot)
3 Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!	Bolt	Very Brutal Christmas (Austrian Death Machine)
4 Yuvvraaj	Australia	Just Stand Up (Artists Stand up to Cancer)
5 Maharathi	Quantum of Solace	Hot N Cold (Katy Perry)

Courtesy: Film Information



Maradona Magic

THE whiff of disbelief was unmistakable. A generous sprinkling of grey heads flocked Calcutta's Salt Lake stadium to watch Argentine football legend Diego Maradona, well past his prime, in flesh and blood. Yet, the euphoria ended in a volley of bottle-and-brickbat missiles—true Calcutta style!



Statement of Purpose

B-TOWN heart throb Imran Khan proudly posed for the paparazzi with his anti-Bush T-shirt and girlfriend Avantika (Shobha De's daughter) at the premier of *The President Is Coming*.

Lazarus Awakens

Ms UK Lisa Lazarus, yet another Brit, makes her Bollywood debut in a Salman-starrer, *Veer*. With four bouncers in tow, all the attention and Salman to boot, it's another of those near-heaven moment.



Datuk Batuk

DATUK Shahrux Khan, in traditional black and gold Malay attire, bent low to receive his knighthood for promoting Malaysia in the region's film industry. Voices of dissent were heard...local artists? Aren't they deserving too?



A River Called Teesta

THROUGH 26/11 and the next 60 hours that violated so many lives in Mumbai, I happened to be in Ahmedabad. Incongruously, there was no public display of emotions in this city, known to be short on its communal fuse. In private too, hate-speech seemed minimal. That Narendra Modi captured eyeballs by strategically locating himself between the Taj Hotel and the TV cameras was discussed approvingly. No one suggested that this might have been gamesmanship of the worst kind. Yet there was no ratcheting up of passions. The only bizarre twist I heard was from some prosperous businessmen, who said, "Of course, no one will be punished because Teesta Setalvad will come in between and talk of human rights." All power to Teesta for having made such a dent in the popular consciousness.



Sun City

CHENNAI, after this, was like landing directly into Act V of *Henry IV*, where uncles and nephews kiss and make up. The First Family of Tamil Nadu was, once again, closing ranks as Karunanidhi (with help from sons Azhagiri and Stalin and daughter Selvi) offered the glove of peace to estranged grand-nephews Kalanidhi and Dayanidhi Maran. The year-long standoff between the two families was the stuff of soap opera as both sides openly taunted each other. It cost Dayanidhi his ministry at the Centre. But now everyone was smiling. The collective dental radiance generated when the young and old gathered around the paterfamilias for a photo-op was designed to whitewash any memory of this momentary black spot in the Sun parivar.



Pan-Dravidian Parasol

CHENNAI, meanwhile, had its own tryst with mayhem of another kind. This time a raging storm from the Bay of Bengal, incessant rains over five days, large-scale flooding and a total collapse of all systems. It is fascinating how Chennai's civic authorities pretend they live in the middle of the Gobi desert. Every rain seems a phoenix too frequent, a rare natural occurrence that catches everyone by surprise. As if the city is not in a cyclonic zone and it is foolish to buy umbrellas in October! And then it rains. No, it comes down in torrents. Clogged rainwater drains regurgitate the water back on to the streets. Drinking water and sewage lines homogenise into a rave cocktail. Subways flood all the way to the top (obviously, the intention was

to build a Tantalus cup, not a subway). However, just as everyone loves a good drought, everyone loves a good flood too. This is when politicians offer prayers to the rain god. Because one or two storms in a season, especially before elections, are like Lakshmi at the door. This is when the word 'relief' rolls easily off official tongues. This season, the demand is for a mere Rs 1,200 crore package. If we had used all the 'relief' the state has received for

rain damage in the past 25 years, we could have built a roof over the entire state with a rainwater harvesting system to collect all the water and relieve someone else's drought.

Ich bin ein Mumbaikar

ANYONE (and I mean, Raj Thackeray) who thought Mumbai was solely for the Marathi mannos had not reckoned with an even more potent idea—the Mumbai mannos—which has no relation to Mumbai's geographic boundary. Any casual visitor to Chennai's Marina Beach last Sunday would have discovered what I mean. Over 2,000 people under the banner of 'Citizens for Change' turned up to paint posters and slogans. And almost everyone said he or she was a Mumbaikar at heart. It's the way I feel too. Years ago I've been part of campaigns in Mumbai by Mrinal Gore and Pramila Dandavate against the obscene opulence that the Taj and Oberoi hotels represent, but I'm deeply offended by the terrorist assault on this city. But the voices from Chennai had other things to offer. A campaign has been initiated by citizens rallying under the slogan 'Reclaiming Politics, Reclaiming Democracy'.

They seek to find answers to questions relating to terrorism. Another Chennai citizens' initiative proposes that fisherfolk, having guarded the coast for centuries, be recognised as the real Coast Guard. One knew Chennai could think out of the box. But all this was special.

Armada of Words

ALL good ideas in Tamil Nadu, however, crash against the rock of bad politics. The incongruity of the Tamil demand for a tightening of coastal borders in the rest of the country—as against wanting to keep it open for the LTTE in the south—is a kind of schizophrenia. So is the demand (from the film fraternity) that India should invade Sri Lanka on behalf of the beleaguered ethnic Tamil community there. Now, Sri Lankan army chief Sarath Fonseka has touched a raw nerve, dubbing politicians here as jokers. And mavericks like Vaiko (of the MDMK) are setting out to prove why this might be so.